WITH RANK AND FILE

OR

SIDELIGHTS ON SOLDIER LIFE

BY

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TO MY SISTER

ELLA

IN TOKEN OF THE DEPTH

OF

MY AFFECTION.

PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH we as a nation are justly proud of our soldiers, and although their heroism on the battle-field and on 'Active Service' is duly recognized and appreciated; yet but little of their true natures, of their thoughts, feelings and trials is perhaps generally understood.

We are possibly too prone to think of the soldier (as opposed to the officer, though he too does not escape) as a coarse, licentious, hardened being, innocent of any of the finer feelings of our human nature, though brave and enduring on occasion.

In the following 'Sidelights,' an effort, however feeble, has been made to draw a true picture of some of those of all ranks who have the honour to serve their Queen, and of their real characteristics; to show that an element of pathos may frequently enter into their daily existence; to let it be inferred that although many of the 'Rank and File' may be coarse

and brutal, yet all sorts and conditions of men are to be found among them, and that many, possibly those most rough and most uneducated, are devoted, honest, deeply grateful for kindness shown, and easily swayed by the gentle influences of comradeship and love.

Of the stories in this book offered for the perusal of the public, three have already appeared in Regimental Magazines. They are now reproduced, corrected and, it is hoped, amended. The remainder are here printed for the first time.

ARTHUR AMYAND.

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'CLUMPS'

OR

'A DISGRACE TO THE CORPS.'

An Incident in the History of H.M.'s —th Regiment.

'CLUMPS.'

CHAPTER I.

"'CLUMPS' is in for it again," said Watson, as he entered the regimental Ante Room, where half-a-dozen or so of his brother officers were, after a hard morning's work on the parade ground, awaiting with keen appetites the announcement that luncheon was ready; for, although the regiment was quartered at Malta, it is by no means too hot in December to feel hungry at that station.

"What's happened? What did the Colonel say?" they ask, with some excitement.

Watson, who, to do him justice, was a good officer, but dearly loved to make himself important, (not a difficult matter, for he was senior subaltern), assumed a patronizing air and continued,

"Well, you know what a confounded ass he made of himself on parade this morning;

the Colonel has told him he won't stand it any longer,—and serve him right, too."

These remarks were received with general approval, the fact being that the —th Regiment was to be inspected by the General in two days' time, and, although its gallant and particularly smart Colonel held that his regiment was ready for inspection at any time, it had been thought advisable to put some of the younger officers through their facings that morning, and accordingly they had been called out to drill their companies. The unfortunate 'Clumps' had made a terrible exhibition of himself. After having utterly failed in skirmishing and sundry other movements, he had been finally told to put his men through the bayonet exercise, with the result that he became hopelessly mixed, and was accordingly abruptly ordered to march his company back to its place on the parade ground. This he only accomplished by getting his rear rank men in front, whereupon he was informed that the Commanding Officer required his presence at the Orderly Room after parade.

George Masterson, or 'Clumps,' was a second lieutenant of some two years' service which may be described as two years of misery and failure. During this period he had become

an object of ridicule, annoyance, and consequent dislike to his brother officers. He was an uncouth, ungainly, untidy, yet powerfully made creature, with enormous feet and corresponding boots, and he walked with a peculiarly noisy heel-down-first-and-toe-afterwards kind of step, which gained him the name of 'Clumps' before he had been with his regiment a single day. He was one of those people who are utterly incapable of doing anything right, no matter what they turn their hands to, and being at the same time of an extremely sensitive nature, the sufferings he went through were very great. One thing he learnt, however, very quickly; namely, to bear all the ridicule and jokes at his expense without complaint, and after a time without even showing how much he felt.

Clumps' up-bringing had been sadly neglected. His mother had died when he was quite a child, and his father had married again, a wife who ruled her husband completely, and who snubbed her stepson on every occasion; while every possible favour, and all the affection of both parents, was lavished on her own children. Young Masterson was practically left to run wild at home till sent to a private school, but he eventually found his way into the army, after having spent a few months in

solitude at a private tutor's. Intellectually, indeed, he was sharp enough, his sole consolation being his books, but ordinary routine work was abhorrent to him, and he never could master the principles of drill. At the same time his nervous and sensitive nature, combined with lack of training, made him appear lamentably deficient in common sense, and in that sharpness and readiness which, under such conditions, can only be gained by constant contact with others, and by an occasional word of friendly advice and sympathy.

It may thus be easily understood that when Clumps found himself suddenly in a smart infantry regiment he was utterly at sea. As time went on his disposition only made matters worse, and, realizing his deficiencies, he gradually became sulky and sullen. He was of good parentage, which was in his favour, but everything else about him gave rise to ridicule—his walk, his clothing, his ignorance of the ordinary courtesies of society; and last, but not least, his absent-mindedness and nervousness, which were the chief cause of his inability to ever give a correct word of command on parade.

It was frequently hinted to him that he must 'go,' as he was not 'up to —th regimental form,'

but the poor fellow did not know what to put his hand to if he left the regiment or service, while he was well aware that if he turned up at his home having taken such a step, his father would have nothing to say to him, and that his future would be worse than his present existence. He therefore remained, mentally determining not to budge if possible, and thinking that if the worst came to the worst he could drown himself and so end his unhappy life. He began to see also that he was a laughing-stock to the men as well as to the officers; and this was the unkindest cut of all, for he really loved his men, and, having had little sympathy in his life himself, would have done anything in his power to help any one of them or to show them any kindness. They were well aware of this; but 'Tommy Atkins' is keenly alive to ridicule, and resents deeply being made a fool of on parade or anywhere else through the incompetency of his officers; and therefore, though the soldiers did not actually dislike him, they did not respect him, and 'Old Clumps'' latest achievement on or off parade was among the commonest jokes in the barrack-room.

One of the men of his company there was, however—Private Williams—who would not hear a word said against him, and who was

always ready to take up cudgels in defence of Clumps. This man, who was a fine, smart fellow, had been appointed his servant, and was a comparatively old soldier and a married man; and he became his master's faithful friend and adviser, to whom, if Clumps ever did anything right at all, such unwonted behaviour was almost certainly due. Their friendship began at once, for Williams commenced by taking his master in hand and telling him what to do, and Clumps was grateful and showed Williams many small kindnesses in return. A certain circumstance, however, served to strengthen the ties between them, and also to bring to the fore a trait in Clumps' character which was scarcely suspected by his brother officers.

The married quarters of —— Barracks, Malta, where the regiment was stationed, are outside the barrack gate, and there is a rough rocky road which, passing them, extends for some three hundred yards down an exceedingly steep hill till it meets the main road leading through the ramparts beneath. Some one had taken an open 'carrozze' or four-wheeled carriage, such as is used in Malta, and kept it waiting outside these married quarters, rather round the corner, in the shade. The driver meanwhile, according to the habit of the natives, got off the

box and went to sleep in the verandah. Williams' child, a fine boy just four years old, and another, a year or so older, the son of a sergeant in the regiment, were playing together, and eventually got into the carrozze without being noticed. The pony moved off, quietly at first, down the aforesaid road ; then, alarmed by the children's cries, and finding itself uncontrolled, it increased its pace, and, breaking into a gallop, finally fairly ran away. At the bottom of the hill, right across the road and directly in the path of the carrozze, were drawn up a number of native carts laden with stones. The elder child, having climbed on to the seat, was thrown out by the carrozze bumping violently over a rough piece of ground, and escaped with a fright and a bruising ; but Williams' boy was still inside, when Clumps came providentially round the corner, just at the spot where all the carts were standing, and perceived the position of affairs. The carrozze was then coming madly down the hill towards him, between forty and fifty yards from the line of carts, and he knew that everything depended on him. He rushed forward as quickly as possible to get space, and placed himself directly in the way, trusting to his strength, which was great. The pony saw him, wavered, then galloped on, but Clumps,

who had sprung slightly on one side, succeeded in seizing him by the head. He was, of course, knocked down, but never loosed his hold, and he stopped the carrozze just before it reached the stone-carts, saving the child's life and spraining his own ankle. Williams never forgot this circumstance, and showed his gratitude by the utmost devotion and many a timely hint; while his wife simply adored Clumps ever after, and went so far as to offer to do his washing for nothing. Clumps, on his part, reciprocated this affection and looked on Williams as his one real ally in the regiment.

After this somewhat long digression, it will perhaps be remembered that we left Watson beginning to describe to a circle of attentive subalterns what had taken place in the Orderly Room when Clumps was summoned there after parade. We must therefore direct the attention of our readers once more to the Regimental Ante Room.

"Well, go on, Watson, out with it," exclaimed one of his brother officers, as the above-named gentleman, having given vent to the expression, 'Serve him right,' had paused, whereby the general excitement in anticipation of some important information was considerably heightened.

"You fellows are in such a beastly hurry," continued Watson, "but if you must know all about it, I happened to be in the Orderly Room seeing about my leave, when in walks Clumps. After nearly tumbling over his sword, he came up to the C.O.[1] and made one of those ghastly attempts at a salute of his, looking a most *awful* fool. The Colonel, who was really in a deuce of a rage and fidgetting in his chair, told me to remain, just as I was going to leave the room. 'Fizzers' was there too, of course!" ('Fizzers' was the Adjutant, so called from the enormous quantity of ginger-beer he was capable of consuming in the hot weather.)

"Then the Colonel turned to Clumps and said, 'I must say a few words to you very seriously, Mr. Masterson. I have come to the conclusion that you do not suit the —th, and I am sorry to have to tell you that you'"—the next words were uttered by Watson in his most imposing manner—"'must leave the Regiment.'"

"What! you don't mean it?" interrupted the admiring circle.

"I do though," continued Watson.

"What did Clumps say?"

"Oh, he turned very white, and tried to say

[1] Commanding Officer.

something, but the C.O. stopped him, and went on: 'I have not said this without consideration, Mr. Masterson, but you have been given every chance' (and upon my word I think the C.O. has been devilish good to him), 'and I have done all I can for you; so has Captain French'" (the Adjutant), "'I'm sure he has had you out on the parade ground often enough!'"

"I should think he had," said little 'Jinks,' the last joined, who was junior to Clumps, and had a sneaking pity and friendship for him.

"Shut up, Jinks, don't interrupt or you will be sat on," said one of the others.

"When you fellows have done, I'll go on," said Watson, in a tone of annoyance; then, after a dignified look round, during which silence was restored, he continued:

"'But it's no good, Mr. Masterson,' the Colonel said, 'you are perfectly useless as an officer, and it seems impossible to put any smartness of any kind whatever into you. The —th has never been accustomed to have inefficient officers, and such an one as you not only makes a laughing-stock of himself and of his Commanding Officer, and the regiment appear ridiculous to the rest of the garrison, but he lowers himself in the eyes of his men, which is most prejudicial to the proper maintenance of discipline. In addition, you do

not seem to be anything of a companion to your brother officers, (which is against the regimental feeling of the —th), and I do not wish to have any one in my regiment who is unsuited to his companions, or unhappy himself. After your exhibition this morning I shall not require your presence on parade at the inspection on Thursday, and I shall explain to the General that I am obliged, much against my will, to report on you as inefficient.'

"By this time Clumps was nervously twitching all over, and the Colonel, seeing the state he was in, said, 'If I can help you in any way, Mr. Masterson, I shall be happy to do so. You had better go and think the matter over. In what I have said, of course, I wish you to understand that I do not mean to cast any slur on your character, but am merely reflecting on your efficiency as an officer.'"

"What did Clumps do then?"

"The best part's coming," continued Watson, with a superior smile. "Clumps came up nearer to the Colonel, and stammered out, 'Oh, sir, won't you allow me to stay?' 'No, sir,' said the Colonel, impatiently, 'I have made up my mind, and you must leave the regiment. I can't keep an officer any longer who is a *positive disgrace to the Corps!*'"

"Hear! hear! Well done, good old C.O.!" chimed in the subalterns.

"As soon as the Colonel had said this, you should have seen Clumps. He took a step back from the table, drew himself up, and looked utterly different. I had no idea he could look like that before. His eyes flashed, the colour came into his face, and raising his hand, he said in a clear voice, and what the deuce he meant I can't make out,—

'I will leave the regiment, sir, but you and my brother officers shall own, *not as a disgrace, but as an honour* to the corps.'"

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, all I can say is that I am devilish sorry for poor Clumps," exclaimed little Jinks on the conclusion of Watson's narrative, "I think it's beastly hard lines."

"What rot you are talking," rejoined one of the others, "he's a useless ass, and when he goes, it will be a d——d good riddance. What good is a surly, muddle-headed fellow like that to us?"

"And if he is surly, who helped to make him so, I should like to know?" retorted Jinks. "You've had a good share in it, I bet, Phillips. Why, you never give the poor beggar a moment's peace!"

"What do you mean?" asked Phillips, angrily.

"I mean that I've seen the way you always treat Clumps, and I remember the way you tried to treat me, only I wasn't going to stand it!"

Now Phillips was by nature one of those not

unfrequently met individuals, a regimental bully, and if he had dared, and had not belonged to a regiment that did not countenance such behaviour, he would have made the life of every last joined subaltern a hell on earth. Though not popular, he was however supported by the rest of his brother officers in his treatment of Clumps, the latter being so generally an object of ridicule. But when he tried to worry Jinks, he reckoned without his host. That astute young gentleman was possessed of an uncommonly sharp tongue of his own, and one day when Phillips tried to badger him, Jinks first informed him that he was perfectly aware 'what sort of chap' he was, and that he had better mind his own business, and then he marched straight up into the Ante Room and told all the others what he had said. Being a cheery, gentlemanly young fellow, and having made a very favourable impression in the regiment, little Jinks at once carried the day, and the tide of opinion was turned against Phillips, who never interfered with him again.

At the conclusion of Jinks' remarks, Phillips jumped up angrily, and was going to reply, when he was interrupted by Watson, who said authoritatively,

"Oh, shut up, Phillips; I'm not going to have

a row here, and as for you, Jinks, you've no business to give your opinion so freely. You ought to know that by this time."

Lunch, which was announced at this moment, caused a diversion; but Clumps had a greater friend in Jinks than he ever imagined.

Meanwhile Clumps had gone back to his quarters in a curious frame of mind. He threw himself into a chair and tried to consider matters.

"What did it all mean, and what had happened? Yes! there was no doubt about it; he had been told to go, to leave the regiment, because he was 'perfectly useless.'"

He looked back on the past two years, and could only see a long list of failures. Somehow he had always done the wrong thing. How many times had he been corrected by the Colonel, sworn at by the adjutant, and made himself ridiculous before both officers and men! He had, however, tried hard, and he knew that the reason of it all was not that he did not know what to say and do, but simply that, given a parade-ground and a body of men depending on his words, he became so nervous that everything went out of his head. How often had this occurred! Why? *why* had he been created so differently to other people? The Colonel had actually stig-

matized him as a 'disgrace to the corps;' and he then recalled his own prophetic reply, which had burst so spontaneously from his lips, that his Colonel and brother officers should own the contrary ere he left. 'A disgrace to the corps!' His blood boiled at the thought of it. True, he hated drill, and made a hash of things, but was *that* disgraceful? Certainly to be forced to leave the regiment implied disgrace. His own people would regard it as such, nor did he see the slightest chance of its being viewed differently by any other regiment into which he might endeavour to exchange.

A disgrace! It was a cruel, unjust term of opprobrium, and must be proved to be such. But how? For the time was short. The Colonel would require him to send in his papers at once, and would probably give him leave immediately, pending the confirmation of his retirement at headquarters. A disgrace! How much time was left him in which to make his Commanding Officer retract the words he had used, in which to change his and the other officers' opinion of him,—nay! to convert that so-called disgrace into *honour?* A day and a half at most. He was to be on duty to-morrow; on the following day was to be the inspection, on which day also the P. and O. boat sailed

for home; no doubt he would be expected to go then. Time enough! but how was it to be done? And what strangely sudden influence had caused him to utter those words of self-vindication with such conviction to his Colonel?

He could not guess; only as he sat there the same prophetic feeling that had swayed him on that occasion again flooded his whole soul, and he felt perfectly confident that an opportunity would be given him. He felt that that God who had denied him so much love, sympathy, companionship, who had at the same time endowed him with such a sensitive nature—that God, who had hitherto caused his existence to be one of failure and misery, was about to grant him one supreme favour which should be the crowning moment of his life, and repay him for the past.

He got up from his chair and walked across the room, and caught sight of his face in the glass. He scarcely recognized himself. He stopped and looked again. He saw flushed cheeks and bright eyes, naturally enough caused by the excitement of all he had gone through; but he also saw a greater change, which indeed he could not read, a change which was caused by an inborn consciousness of power that had suddenly possessed him, and which had stamped his countenance with an expres-

sion of force and self-reliance hitherto unknown to it.

Yes! In his heart he felt confident, he scarce knew of what, save that the path of honour would be surely opened to him; and, mastered by this conviction, he now felt that he could endure to face his brother officers without shame, while a new-born spirit of peace and content shed rays of happiness into his soul.

Such was his frame of mind when he sat down to write his application to retire, and for leave pending retirement. He had just finished, when in came Williams, to whom he at once entrusted the letters for conveyance to the Orderly Room.

Williams took the letters, eyeing them suspiciously; then he looked at his master, and at once remarked the change in his appearance. He stood before him for a few moments, then said, saluting,

"Beg pardon, sir, but isn't you well?"

Clumps blushed at this question, and answered nervously,

"Yes, thank you, Williams, why?"

"Well, sir, I don't know, but it strikes me uncommon like as if you 'ad a touch of this 'ere Malta fever!"

"Nonsense, Williams, I'm all right!"

"Well, sir, 'scuse me, but your face do 'pear

to be so red like, and, I beg pardon, sir, but you looks different altogether."

"Why, what on earth are you talking about?" answered Clumps. "There is nothing wrong with me."

"You take my advice and go to bed, sir; it's the only thing with this 'ere fever and aguey. I've 'ad it lots o' times, and I knows it well, worse luck. I'll send the doctor to you."

"Humbug, Williams, I tell you, I'm all right. Will you please take those letters to the Orderly Room for me at once?"

Williams shook his head doubtfully, and replied:

"Well, I suppose you knows, sir, but if I ain't mistook, you'll be ill afore mornin';" then he hesitated, and, looking again at the letters suspiciously, continued:

"These 'ere letters, sir, you'll 'scuse me axin' but is they all right?"

"Why, yes, of course! Don't you think I am capable of writing an official letter yet, Williams?"

"I don't know, sir, but you does make mistakes, sometimes," replied Williams, gravely, having a vivid recollection of the battle he had recently been fighting for his master in the barrack room, where Clumps had been coming in for

a good round of abuse, on account of his morning performance and where the generally expressed opinion was that "that there Clumps ain't no —— good at all, and don't give a smart lot of fellows like we a bloomin' chance." "But," continued Williams, mysteriously: "I don't mean that, sir; is they *all right?*"

"What on earth *do* you mean?" asked Clumps.

Now, Williams was great friends with the orderly room clerk, who lived in the next set of married quarters to him, and although this individual had not been in the Orderly Room at the time of the Colonel's remarks, he had heard the whole thing through the door connecting that room with the one occupied by the clerks, which had been left slightly ajar. He had promptly communicated the fact to Williams, whom he had overtaken going home to dinner; and though Williams had not subsequently said a word about it, he knew that it would be all over barracks before night time. His mind was greatly disturbed at the circumstance, and with grief at the idea of losing his young master, whom he regarded with almost parental affection.

"Well, sir," went on Williams, "I've 'eard something, and you'll forgive me, sir, but I

'opes' as 'ow it's a pack of flamin' lies, sir." With these words he edged nearer to Clumps at the table, and looked down on him with a look in which affection and indignation were clearly mingled.

Clumps began to feel very uncomfortable, as he guessed that the unpleasant tidings were already spreading in the barracks. He could only say helplessly, "What is it you have heard?"

Williams hesitated; then striking viciously with his fist on the table, exclaimed,

"These 'ere damned blue letters (forgive the word! sir), I '*ates*' em. They only means trouble, —they always does, sir. Many and many a time 'ave I seen trouble come out of these 'ere bits of blue. Don't you write nothin' sir. Once written and sent to that there 'crime hole' (the Orderly Room), maybe you won't be able to get 'old of 'em again. Ribbons will pass 'em on quick enough, I'll lay a tanner."

Ribbons was the name of the Orderly Room clerk, in whose power for good or evil, Williams, perhaps not wrongly, firmly believed.

"I 'ain't often told you wrong, sir," he continued, "and I've been with you all the time as you 'as been in the regiment, and proud I is to say it,—and," whispering almost in Clumps' ear,

"*I knows all about it, sir*, and what's in them blue envelopes. You take my advice, sir, don't you send 'em."

"How on earth do you know anything about it?" asked Clumps, half amused, yet touched at Williams' vehemence.

"You'll mention it to no one, sir, will you? but Ribbons 'eard it all, and told me at dinner time. I told my missus, and she took on somethin' orful; she says she can't abear to think of your goin',—to say nothing of the washin'. You take my advice, sir, and don't you send them letters," he repeated.

"But what else can I do, Williams?"

"You go and see the Colonel, sir, and speak to 'im. He was a bit flustered like this morning; for those damned fools ('scuse the word, sir!) in the company got into such a proper 'mix up.' It was all their fault, they never knows 'ow to take you, and so does it all wrong. Now *I* knows, sir" (Williams was the right-hand man of the company) "that if you says 'right,' you mea is 'left,' and if you says 'point' you means 'guard'; but they don't, and they won't foller me—the bloomin' idjots. It's my belief as 'ow they does it a purpose. No, you go and see the Colonel, sir, and speak to him friendly like, and it'll be all right. He don't really mean to

make you leave; 'e thinks too much of you, sir. The Colonel's lady said so when she come to see my missus, after you saved my youngster, Johnny's, life; she'd 'eard all about it from Mrs. Jones, and she said the Colonel would be proud to think as 'ow you'd done it; and so 'e might be, sir. *I* shan't forget it, I can tell you."

"It's no good, Williams, I have to go, and now I really wish to do so."

"Wish to go!" rejoined Williams, scornfully; "what is you goin' to do, then, when you goes? Look 'ere, sir, just you go and see the Colonel, and ax him to let you stay, and you shall drill me in this 'ere blessed room every day, whenever you likes. I'll bet you'll soon learn it all then, and you can 'oller as much as you like, and drill me as if I was the 'ole bloomin' battalion."

Clumps only shook his head doubtfully, and Williams went on in an almost broken voice:

"Look 'ere, sir, I can't abide to think as 'ow you is leavin'; it's bad for you, sir, but it's wuss for *me*. You've been a good 'un to me, sir, and I should not 'ave 'ad Johnny now if it warn't for your savin' 'im. You *won't* leave the regiment, sir, will you? You'll take my word, and go and see the Colonel? I can't abide

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your going, sir!" he added, tremulously, while the tears came into his eyes.

"It's no use asking me," replied Clumps, much moved by Williams' devotion; "I *have* to leave, whether I like it or not. The Colonel told me he would not keep me, and now I should not think of asking him to allow me to remain. Why, he actually told me, Williams, that I was a 'disgrace to the corps!' After *that*, I am not going to beg to stay; but, nevertheless, I shall prove to him that he is wrong before I leave."

"A disgrace! Oh, my 'eavenly Father—and *you* saved my Johnny!" ejaculated Williams in despair.

"Yes, I have to go; but the time is coming, Williams, when things will change as far as I am concerned. My hard time is over, and I feel that I don't care a curse for it all now. Something makes me know that my chance of showing that perhaps I am not so utterly useless,—of proving that I am not a disgrace, is coming.—Whatever happens, Williams," and he held out his hand, "I am grateful to you for all your kindness, and, believe me! I look on you as the one true friend I have, and,—God forgive me!—the only one I regret leaving."

Williams seized his master's hand, and bending

over it, fairly broke down ; and, unable to control himself, hurried from the room.

As for Clumps, he was profoundly affected by this interview. Still he felt happy. Happy in the almost divine belief with which he was inspired—happy in the consciousness of a newborn power within him, happy in the knowledge that he was truly *loved* by one man—if only *one* —with the whole depth of affection and gratitude of a rough but honest heart.

CHAPTER III.

THAT night, when Clumps went to mess, his brother officers were much surprised at him. There had been a good deal of speculation among them as to whether he would face the ordeal or not. They were therefore rather astonished when he turned up quite naturally, never indeed having thought of doing anything else; but it was chiefly his manner and appearance that they were at a loss to understand. All the old awkwardness and shyness seemed to have left him, and to have been replaced by a self-reliant manner, almost suggestive of superiority. The sullen heavy look was no longer on his face, his eyes were lighted with a gleam of pride, and as he glanced round on entering the Ante-Room, his heightened colour making him look almost handsome, his companions felt that they had to deal with a different man to the ungainly, nervous individual, who had made such a fool of himself on parade that morning.

At dinner he seemed quite at his ease, and

took part in the general conversation; the only one who tried to interfere with him was Phillips, who remarked during a pause,

"I hear you are going on leave, Clumps."

This elicited the quiet but astonishing reply,

"I don't suppose I shall ever leave Malta," at which Phillips was so surprised that he did not venture to address him again. On Clumps going into the Ante-Room after dinner, these words of his occasioned a good deal of comment among those who still remained at table.

"I say, Fizzers, what on earth did Clumps mean by saying he was not going to leave Malta?" said one addressing the Adjutant, "Didn't you say his applications were in?"

"Yes," replied Fizzers, "I went into the Orderly Room on coming back from the polo ground, and saw them. They'll be put before the Colonel to-morrow."

"Well," said Watson, "if he intends to remain on in Malta after he leaves us, the —th will have to know the reason why;" then he added meditatively, "I'm blowed if I can make him out; he seemed a different man to-night, and has quite changed since the Colonel spoke to him this morning."

This was indeed the general opinion, for which they were all at a loss to account.

As for Clumps himself, he left the mess early, and went back to his quarters in a singularly contented frame of mind. He, too, recalled the reply he had made to Phillips, and then wondered why he had made it. He could not account for the words, which seemed as if they had been put into his mouth, and to have slipped out *nolens volens*. Having, however, said them, he believed them, and was content to let the matter rest there, without worrying his head as to what would happen. He looked round the room, and meditated whether he should pack up, or put any of his things together. If he was to be on duty to-morrow, and to leave on the day of the inspection, he supposed he ought to do something; but the conviction became so strong in his mind that he was not going away from Malta at all, that he sat down in his chair, took up a book, and gave up all thoughts on the subject. As he sat down, his eyes fell upon the ring he wore; one of the few things which had come to him from his mother, whom he could only dimly recollect, but whom he had dearly loved. It was a curious old ring, and had belonged to one of his mother's ancestors, and he had always valued it highly. It occurred to him, he didn't know why, that he would like some one of his

family to have it. Acting on the impulse, he took it off his finger, and having kissed it reverently in remembrance of its former possessor, he put it in a small cardboard box, writing on the slip of paper, in which he wrapped it, "For Jack, as a remembrance from his affectionate brother, George Masterson." He then tied the box up, sealed it, and wrote on it: 'To be sent to my brother Jack, Holmby, Yorkshire.'

While thus engaged, Clumps thought of this same brother Jack, now eleven years old, and how much he would have loved him and played with him when at home, had not his step-mother always done her best to keep the child out of his way. But in spite of this, Jack was very fond of Clumps, from whom he had never had a harsh or unkind word, which is not always the case with elder brothers.

Clumps had just put the packet away in the table drawer, when there came a rather timid knock at the door, and who should walk in, but little Jinks, smoking a large meerschaum, nearly as big as himself.

He was very much surprised at this visit, since though he and Jinks had always got on together, the latter had never honoured him with a call before; nor indeed had any of his brother officers, unless it was to 'make hay' of

his things, or otherwise worry and annoy him. He drew a chair up to the fire for his visitor, however, and said

"Sit down, Jinks."

Jinks sat down, and then remarked awkwardly,

"You see, Clumps, I thought I'd come round —to—to—see if I could help you."

"Thank you very much," replied Clumps; "but in what way?"

"Well, you see," went on Jinks, nervously, "I—I—thought you might be packing, and find it rather dull, and I thought I might be of some use,"—a rather amusing remark on the part of Jinks, as he was notoriously averse to having anything whatever to do with packing his own things, and always left everything to his servant; with the result that it had become a standing joke how Jinks had found himself minus a boot, or a sponge, or a waistcoat, or some absolute necessity, wherever he went, and had been obliged to victimize his fellow-guests or his host by borrowing from them in consequence. Clumps, knowing the joke, smiled by way of reply, and Jinks added, looking round the room,

"But you don't seem to be doing any packing; you won't have much time as you are orderly 'hound'[1] to-morrow," then he asked, in

[1] Orderly Officer.

a low and serious tone, "Aren't you going, Clumps?"

This question fairly nonplussed Clumps, who made no reply, but merely nodded his head in a sort of dubious assent.

"Well, I say, Clumps,—old chap," continued Jinks almost tenderly, and gathering courage, "I came to tell you how awfully sorry I am about it all."

"Don't, Jinks, don't! please don't speak about it."

"Oh, but I will," said Jinks, rising indignantly; "I think it's a beastly shame, and I told them so, too."

"Did you, really, Jinks?" asked Clumps, astonished at this most unexpected sympathy.

"Yes, and I told that brute Phillips what I thought of his behaviour to you. He has never given you a chance, and has continually been worrying and badgering you. In fact, I told them all just now that if they had only treated you differently, you would be a devilish sight better fellow than any of them are; but they've always 'gone for' you, and have given you no peace."

"Well, never mind now, Jinks, it's all over; I shan't have any more of it."

"I'm awfully sorry you're going," repeated

Jinks, emphatically. "Clumps, old chap," he added, "I can't forget how good you were to me when I joined; how you looked after me and my kit, and did all sorts of things for me, and told me what to do. You might have made it very beastly for me, you know!"

"Oh! I did nothing," remarked Clumps, "I only lent you my servant."

"Oh, yes you did though," replied Jinks. —"I tell you what, Clumps, I'm going to the Colonel to-morrow, and I shall tell him it's all a d——d shame."

"No, indeed you won't do anything of the kind," said Clumps, "you'll only get into a row yourself, and be told to mind your own business."

"I don't care. I shall go. I've made up my mind. I feel so awfully sick about it all, and I should be so devilish sorry if they drove you away."

"Now look here, Jinks!" replied Clumps, quietly and firmly; "it's very kind of you. I can't tell you how I feel it, but I shan't allow you to do this; besides, I wish to go."

"*Wish* to go?" repeated Jinks.

"Yes; I have been told to leave the regiment, and I wish to do so. Do you think I would ask to remain *now?* I don't know what is

going to happen, Jinks," he continued in tones of awed conviction, "but as sure as I stand here, when I am gone—don't think me presumptuous for saying this—they will regret the steps they have taken, and the Colonel will retract the word 'disgrace' that he has used towards me. Yes, Jinks, I shall wipe away the accusation of this disgrace before I leave you; but I have a presentiment," and he lowered his voice, "that —*I shall die*."

. . . . . .

It was the next night, the evening preceding the inspection, at which Clumps was forbidden to be present. He had been Orderly Officer all day. The Adjutant had told him that, as he was to be allowed to go on leave the following day, Jinks might do his duty in the afternoon, should he have any private arrangements to make. Clumps, however, declined the offer, and added considerably to the surprise his behaviour had already evoked since the occurrence in the Orderly Room, by informing Fizzers that he had nothing particular to see to. Indeed, he did absolutely nothing, and poor Williams was at his wits' ends as to what were his master's intentions, and hung round his quarters all day like a faithful hound; his frequent suggestions as to packing, etc., being successively repelled. As the day

wore on, however, Clumps began to feel anxious. When was his opportunity coming? Surely his words to the Colonel would not prove to be false? But towards mess time, all his anxiety vanished, and he was seized with a strange feeling of exultation, which he could not restrain. During dinner he was in the highest of spirits, and talked incessantly on every subject in a way he had never previously done, appearing in a totally new light to his brother officers, and utterly regardless of the fact that he was to leave the regiment the next day, stigmatized as a disgrace to the corps. He left the Mess at tattoo to 'collect reports,' and see 'lights out,' and was going to his own quarters, when, by an impulse, he again turned his footsteps to the Officers' Mess, and running up the stone stairs, entered the Ante-Room, where, by this time, all his brother officers were assembled.

"Good-bye!" he said, "Good-bye! all you fellows. Perhaps I shan't see you again,—and I want to say good-bye."

Little Jinks, who had been much affected by his last night's interview, (as indeed had been Clumps also by such unexpected and unasked-for sympathy), and who had, in consequence, been all day overcome with the fear that something terrible was going to happen,

came out from among the rest and caught him by the hand.

"Jinks," said Clumps, "thank you! Thank you for what you said last night! Good-bye!"

"No, not 'good-bye'—yet, old chap," cried Jinks, "I shall see you off,—I mean to see the last of you, Clumps."

Clumps smiled gratefully on him in reply, and wrung his hand; then having once more said 'good-bye!' went hurriedly out of the room.

He went back to his quarters, drew a chair up to the fire, and waited.

CHAPTER IV.

So Clumps sat for an hour or so—waiting—waiting. Meanwhile, stillness began gradually to reign over the barracks. He heard his brother officers go down the verandah, past his quarters, to bed, and Jinks enter the next room. At last he could bear the strain on his nerves no longer, and going to the window, he opened it and looked out. It was a dark night, and there was a strong, cold wind sweeping across the harbour. Shivering, he was about to close the window again, when his attention was attracted by a light in the direction of the soldiers' married quarters, which were situated about three hundred yards from the barracks, and closely adjoined the Colonel's house. The fitful nature of this light struck him as peculiar.

Surely it wasn't—it could not be?—yes! it was—fire,—and not in the married quarters, but in the Colonel's house.

He became perfectly convinced of this as a sudden gleam of flame lit up the surroundings, and revealed the scene as clear as day.

Then he knew that his time had come!

He hesitated no longer, but rushed out of the room, opened the door of Jinks' quarters as he passed, and perceiving that he was still up, cried:

"The Colonel's house is on fire: come on, Jinks!"

Then he tore down to the guard-room.

It took but a moment to turn out the guard, and to make the bugler sound the fire-alarm, and immediately the barracks were thoroughly aroused, and the fire-picquet fell in rapidly, of which, as Orderly Officer, Clumps was in command. He ordered the Sergt.-Major to tell off another party of men, and to send them down with the fire-engine, and a ladder as soon as possible after him to the scene of the fire; then the great gates of the barracks were opened, and he doubled out with the picquet.

If Clumps had been flurried on parade at other times, he was cool enough now; and as he doubled steadily on, the words, "Thank God! thank God! At last! at last!" kept repeating themselves in his brain, in time to his footsteps.

Then he realized that when the fire-engine

arrived it would probably be of no use; for at Malta the water is all stored in tanks and carefully guarded, so that he felt sure that there would be no supply handy to which the hose could be attached.

A few more steps, and they had doubled up the steep sloping path from the great ditch—the barracks in which his regiment was quartered formed part of the permanent fortifications of Malta—and had reached the glacis. They then perceived that one side of the Colonel's house was well alight, and that the flames were spreading along the verandah which, in a double tier, surrounded the house on all sides. The verandahs of the married quarters—only about thirty yards distant—were thronged with groups of excited women and their soldier-husbands, some of whom were already beginning to take their belongings out of the nearest adjoining rooms, for fear the wind should carry the sparks and set alight to them also.

He was now joined by Jinks, who had overtaken the party.

Clumps, seeing him, gasped out,—

"Will you help me, Jinks? will you follow me?"

"Right you are," replied Jinks; "where you go, I go."

A few seconds more and they had reached the spot, and they saw that there was not a moment to lose. The flames were rapidly spreading round the verandah, the strong wind fanning them into increasing fierceness. Outside the house door were a couple of Maltese men-servants, helplessly wringing their hands, and jabbering excitedly to one another, but doing nothing. A few of the married soldiers, however—under the direction of the faithful Williams, who had rushed down to help from the married quarters—had already got themselves into line, and were passing up buckets of water, which were being slowly filled at the only apparent place where it was obtainable, namely, the stable tap. The water, when passed up a short ladder, was dashed on to the fire, but it was of no avail; and it was evident that those on the verandah would not be able to stay there much longer.

Clumps halted his party, and asked the Maltese servants where the Colonel was.

"He and the lady out to dinner, sir," was the reply.

It was then just about 11.15 p.m., so their return might be expected at any moment.

"And where are the children?" continued Clumps.

"The children? Oh! some up there, sir, and—some up there, sir," pointing the second time to where the flames were burning fiercest.

"Why aren't you trying to save them, you cowardly devils?" he cried.

He perceived that the flames were gaining ground so rapidly that it would be almost hopeless to attempt to check them; but having told a sergeant to try if he could possibly find any other sufficient supply of water to enable the fire-engine to be worked on its arrival, he ordered the picquet so to dispose themselves meanwhile as to keep back the now rapidly increasing crowd of women, soldiers, and others.

Then turning to Jinks, he cried,—

"Now, Jinks, for the children!" and making a dash for the door, he attempted to enter the house.

As soon as it was opened, however, he was driven back by a fierce rush of flame. The stair case and the hall were adorned with flimsy Indian and Egyptian hangings, (collected after many years of soldiering), which were all ablaze, and burnt with redoubled ferocity on the influx of the air.

Clearly, ascent by means of the staircase was impossible.

What was to be done, for the men on the

verandah had, by this time, been also forced to abandon their position?

Williams now joined his master, and pointed out that the verandah on the side opposite the stable was not yet alight on the upper tier, though the flames were rapidly approaching it, having caught below. Above the upper tier, again, was the remainder of the wall of the house, in which there were two or three windows —one of them belonging, as it happened, to the bedroom occupied by the two younger children, the Colonel's daughters.

By this window Clumps at once decided to effect his entrance.

He saw that the roof of the stable (like all the roofs of houses in Malta) was flat, and he remembered the ladder which he had ordered to be brought down.

"Where is the ladder?" he asked.

"Here, sir!" was the answer, from one of the party who at that moment had come up with the fire-engine.

"Come on, then, two or three of you,—on to the roof of the stable."

They followed him and Jinks through the stable and up to the roof, and when there shouted to those below to hoist up the ladder, which was sixty feet in length. This

done, they with difficulty and risk managed to raise it on to the sill of the window above-mentioned, just clear of the roof of the upper tier of the verandah. A bridge was thus formed between the house and the stable; and for Clumps, followed by Jinks, to find his way across it, both alike forgetful of their danger, and to climb through the window at which the children were already visible, was the work of a few moments. Williams would have followed, too, but Clumps bid him remain behind, and give assistance if necessary to those whom he and Jinks might rescue. The children, aged respectively seven and five years, were almost dead with fright, but the fire had not as yet reached their room, and Clumps got Jinks to lift one of them on to his back, and then did the same for Jinks. He then climbed through the window again, and started on his return journey, Jinks after him.

Telling the child to cling round his neck and leave his arms free, so that he might balance himself, he crossed the perilous path in safety, and deposited his burden in the arms of Williams; then he turned to retrace his steps, but was horrified to discover that Jinks was lying on the ladder about half way across, with the child hanging on to his neck.

In his hurry Jinks had missed his footing on one of the rungs, and his foot had slipped through, precipitating him full length on to the ladder. The child screamed aloud in terror, but still clung to him. Had she let go, her death was certain, as she would have dropped at least forty feet on to the stones below.

Shouting to her to hold on, Clumps hastened back again, and on reaching Jinks sat down straddle-legs across the ladder, took the child off Jinks' back, and placed her between them.

"Are you all right, Jinks?" he asked.

"Yes," he answered, raising himself up.

Clumps next proceeded to work himself backwards with one hand, holding the child with the other, while Jinks supported her from behind. The stable was thus again reached in safety, and the child was torn from them by her mother; for she and the Colonel were now among the spectators on the stable roof, having returned from their dinner party to find their house in flames, and their children in peril.

"Thanks! Thanks!" cried the Colonel; "but my boy! oh, where is my boy?"

"Your boy?" said Clumps; "I have not seen him, but I will go and fetch him."

"No! no!" replied the Colonel, "you shan't

risk your life again, I will go for him myself!" and he tried to get on to the ladder.

Clumps pushed the Colonel aside almost roughly, and exclaimed,—

"No! sir, this is our business. Come on, Jinks!"

So the two started back once more.

"You won't get him," screamed the Colonel's wife after them. "He's at the other side of the house!"

Clumps and Jinks took no heed, but hurried on.

By this time the upper tier of the verandah was well alight, and it was evident that the ladder itself must ere long be attacked by the flames rising from below. Nothing daunted, however, the courageous pair again crossed the path of peril, and disappeared through the window.

Clumps hurried on through the room, and down a passage in the direction of the room pointed out to him previously by the Maltese servants. He was nearly blinded by the smoke, which was coming down the passage in dense volumes; but he suddenly stumbled over something which, on examination, he discovered to be the partially suffocated form of the Colonel's boy, who had evidently been trying to escape.

A minute or two passed in breathless excitement for the onlookers, which was not lessened when Clumps was seen once more at the window, carrying the senseless child.

He had no one to assist him this time. He would have to carry the boy over alone,—in his arms—no light weight, for the lad was nearly eleven years old.

Would he be able to manage it without the balancing power of his arms ?

Clumps saw his danger, but never quailed. He was obliged, however, to go very slowly. Half-way across he nearly fell, but recovered himself and reached the stable safely with his burden.

The air had almost brought the boy round, and his grateful mother fell on Clumps' neck and kissed him, while the Colonel could only repeat,—

"Noble fellow ! noble fellow !"

"Mr. Jenkins has not come back, sir," said Williams suddenly to Clumps.

"Good God !" cried the Colonel, "Jenkins is there still !"

Clumps in the excitement of saving the boy had forgotten all about little Jinks !

"Jinks! Jinks !" he cried in anguish, "where are you ?"

Then, before they could prevent him, he was again on his way over the abyss, although by this time the flames were encircling the ladder, the further portion of which was actually alight, while the room beyond was also blazing.

"Oh, if I should be too late to save him," he thought, as he almost ran across.

When he reached the other side he was nearly stopped by a burst of flames from below, which sprang up and scorched his face and hands, while his feet and legs got badly hurt; for he was walking literally just above a fiery furnace, while some of the rungs composing his dangerous footpath were well-nigh burnt through. However, he made a spring and gained the window, and the next moment the ladder fell to the ground, while the verandah also collapsed in ruins.

Then arose a cry of horror from the assembled crowd, which now numbered several hundreds, powerless, however, to give any assistance, for the ladder was not long enough to again bridge the intervening space.

"Jinks! Jinks!" cried Clumps once more, as he entered the room, "where are you? For God's sake answer!"

Then he discovered poor Jinks lying on the floor, badly burnt, but not unconscious.

"Oh! Jinks!" he said, "what is the matter? Get on my back, old fellow." But Jinks couldn't.

"Never mind me, Clumps," said Jinks nobly; "save yourself! Good-bye! I said I should see the last of you," and he fainted in his arms.

Clumps bore him to the window, intending to try the ladder again; but he was too late, for it was gone. In despair he turned to the door of the room, the hangings and curtains of which were burning furiously, though the centre of the room was comparatively free from flames. Clumps remembered that when searching for the Colonel's son he had seen another passage off to the right, which, he rightly concluded, led to the roof of the building. There was still a chance!

He dashed through the door-way, scorched, but comparatively unharmed, carrying Jinks as best he might, and gained the passage, as yet almost free from fire, though its walls were cracked with heat. Up the staircase near the end of the passage, he went, and gained the roof. But what was he to do now?

On his way down the passage he had seen a bedroom, evidently that of the Colonel and his wife, into which the fire was only just beginning

to penetrate. He left Jinks for a moment, and returning to this room, tore the blankets and sheets from the bed, and carried them up.

He then thought that he had a moment's breathing space; but a crash, caused by the collapse of a large portion of the house, warned him of his danger; and he bore the lifeless Jinks to the other side facing the stable.

As he appeared on the roof carrying his burden, his figure stood out clearly in the brilliant glare of the fire, and he was greeted by a tumultuous cheer from the small group of persons on the stable opposite, which was echoed again and again by the crowd assembled below.

With the most intense and eager interest they watched him, with his scorched hands, knot the ends of the blankets and sheets together.

Both to them and to him one concentrated thought only was present,—

"Could it be done in time, before the remainder of the roof gave way?" for that it must shortly fall was evident to all.

The onlookers trusted that by some special Providence both might yet be saved; but Clumps thought only of *one*—of Jinks.

At that supreme moment no thought of his own self-preservation intruded; and as he completed his work, and succeeded in tying the improvised rope round Jinks' body, and placing him on the low parapet, Clumps' only fear was that there might not be time to lower him to the ground, or that the rope might catch fire on its downward passage.

Beckoning to those below to be on the look out, he let Jinks down, slowly and carefully, though the senseless body received many a terrible bruise on its way.

Past the window they had entered, past the remaining burning remnants of the verandah, safe at last, into the arms of those below; not, however, before the flames had caught the rope, which parted at the same moment that Jinks reached the ground—saved from the very jaws of death.

All saw, now, that there was no chance for Clumps.

If the rope had remained whole, he might possibly have gained time to find something on the roof to which to tie it, and so lower himself to the ground. There had indeed been this chance, but now there was none—absolutely *none*.

And Clumps knew it.

The room below from which he had torn the blankets and sheets was a mass of flame, and the complete ruin of the building was imminent.

The Colonel wept aloud in his agony at the spectacle; while there were wild yells of—

"Jump! for God's sake, jump!"

And the men ranged themselves below to break his fall.

Clumps, however, stood in the full view of all, and calmly surveyed the scene; the fierce and intense glare showing up distinctly every feature of his countenance.

"Thank God! Thank God!" he thought, as he took it all in.

Then with a happy smile upon his face, he waved his poor burnt hand to bid "Farewell!" —there was a mighty crash, and—he was gone!

And so he waved "Farewell!"

Poor Clumps!

After.all, such a death was worth such a life; and who would dare to say that as he passed to his last great inspection, he was found wanting?

. . . . . .

In the garrison church may be seen the following inscription:—

In Memory of

2nd LIEUT. GEORGE MASTERSON,

H.M.'s —th Regiment,

Who died at Malta, on the 5th December, 1888,

Aged 22 years;

This Monument is erected

by

His comrades of all ranks,

As a tribute of respect and admiration for his

NOBLE CONDUCT

In rescuing his fellow creatures from fire:

By which act of courage he sacrificed his own life,

And became one more grand example of

the heroism of the British Army.

He fell

AN HONOUR TO HIS CORPS.

. . . .

Such, Clumps, was thy '*disgrace!*'

'POOR VALENTINE.'

A STORY OF SUAKIM.

'POOR VALENTINE.'

MY DARLIN JIM,

"I write you a few lines opin it will find you in good ealth as it leave me at present though terrible downarted at the news as George as just brought back from Hereford as you and the ole regiment is leavin Malta and agoin to Suakkim to fight the blacks. George went into Hereford after sellin the little effer you know as I told you about in my last and he eard the news at market and he bought a paper and read it and brought it back ere an he was so put out about it he let the effer go terrible low and fathers that upset about it an says e ain't no good at business. An we've read the paper an it says as ow the eat at Suakkim is somethink orful an as you've got to go an fight them savages all along of General Gordon bein killed an if they'd done as they ought e wouldnt never ave been killed and then you wouldnt a gone and oh dear! oh dear! why did they let im be killed an I thinks its all wicked and perhaps you'll be killed now an wot shall I do. Oh Darlin Jim! forgive me if I upsets you but you knows ow I loves you an I felt I must

write an tell you as ow I was athinkin of you and aprayin for you and so I shall always always Darlin Jim till I ave you back ere again. only one year more Jim an you'll come back an we'll be married if so be as all goes right with you Mr. Jameson says es akeepin the old place open for you but I'm that fearful I scarce knows what to do. I got your last dear letter with the lovelock. Ive tied it up with a little bit of ribbon and put it in the envellope with the letter an Ill tell you a Secret Jim I'm wearin it inside my dress just over my Art an Im sendin you a lock of my air too. Ive tied it with Black ribbon to show ow Im cryin for you and will you if you loves me an *I knows you do* carry it over your Art too Jim and then though I cant see you it ull seem as if *a bit* of us was near to each other. an now Darlin Jim I do ope as ow this ull catch you before you starts or as ow youll get it some ow and youll send us a line soon wont you? Its fearful to think on as you as to go and fight but I knows none will be braver than my own my Darlin Jim. Mother an George an all sends love I dont know ow to tell you what I sends its *All My Art* my Darlin Jim!

"Good-bye your truest

"MAGGY.

"Oh! my Jim! My Darlin Jim! I'm Prayin for You, Jim!"

Private J. Valentine of the ——shire Regiment read the scrawled illiterate letter through, and gulped involuntarily.

Had you been standing by him on that February afternoon on the ramparts surrounding the Floriana Barracks at Malta, the day before his regiment was to sail for Suakim, you would have seen his shoulders heave convulsively, and a great hot scalding tear drop and make an ugly blotch on the paper spread out before him.

It was the first spare moment in the hurry and bustle of preparation for departure that he had managed to get to himself that day, and he had stolen on to the ramparts to read his letter,—the handwriting of which he knew so well. Hastily with his grimy finger he brushed the tear aside; then he took up the lock of golden hair, tied with its bit of black ribbon, and gazed at it lovingly. He pressed it reverently to his lips two or three times, enclosed it again in the folds of the letter, which he put into the envelope, and then he inserted the whole into the breast-pocket of his red serge uniform jacket.

"Next to my 'eart," he said to himself, "yes! next to my 'eart! I'll keep it there till I sees 'er again, and God 'elp the man as tries to take it

from me! Till I sees 'er again!—if ever I *does* see 'er again," he repeated.

With that he turned his steps sadly back to his barrack-room, but a quarter of an hour afterwards was working cheerily with the rest, one of a large fatigue party engaged in stowing away in the stores all the regimental baggage that was to be left behind.

Who of his comrades—save his bosom pal, Jack Smithson, who came from his own home and knew the "missus" (as he called her), and from whom he had scarce a secret—had they seen Private Valentine working away that afternoon, chaffing and laughing with the rest, would have guessed the dead dull weight that lay with that letter upon his heart?

Poor Valentine! As captain of his company I knew him well, and was thus constantly brought into contact with him. He was always in some sort of trouble, and continually before me. Though by no means given to drink, there was not any kind of mischief or devilment forward, in which he was not concerned, or ringleader of. He gave me a terrible deal of worry; but, like everyone else in the regiment, I had a great liking for him, and there was not a man of all the lot that I would have preferred next my side in a row of any sort.

He was the merriest of fellows, with a funny

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twinkle in his blue eyes, and a happy expression on his open face, that all the punishment in the world could not crush out of him. When brought up before his officers for some offence, he would always have the oddest of excuses to make, which, no doubt, often told a good deal in his favour ; and he would take his punishment with a grave sort of "Thank ye, sir," which was not meant to be in the slightest degree disrespectful, but which somehow had the effect of making its imposer feel a tyrannical brute, though he might be nothing of the kind.

In addition there was not a better cricketer, football player, or gymnast, in the regiment than Private Valentine, nor one who was his equal at a good comic song, or step-dance ; nor any one more popular with all ranks than he, with his tall, athletic frame, his handsome, sunny face, crowned with a top-knot of fair, curly hair.

No wonder that Maggy, his "missus," loved him !

We sailed the following day for Suakim. It was a heart-stirring departure !

The men-of-war manned their yards, and the bands of the regiments stationed at Fort Ricasoli and St. Elmo played the regiment out of port to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne." Elated, however, as all were at going on active service,

I question whether many of those who crowded the bulwarks and cheered again and again, did not feel more than "a touch of sadness yet" at the thought of those they left behind, and at the contemplation of the dim and dread possibilities of the future opening before.

The men were on their best behaviour all the way to Suakim, and gave no trouble, with the exception of Valentine. He amused himself one night by tying a comrade into his hammock when asleep, in such a way that it took a good quarter of an hour to get the man unfastened in the morning, by which considerable delay and inconvenience were caused on the troop deck after *reveillée* had sounded.

It was a foolish joke, and done in revenge for some prank the other fellow had previously played Valentine; and, though harmless enough in its way, since it interfered with the routine and discipline of the ship, it caused Valentine to be rather severely dealt with by the Commanding Officer, who warned him, that if he continued to indulge in such folly when on service he would find himself in the "wrong box."

In addition to other punishments, he was deprived of his liquor for the remainder of the voyage; whereupon Valentine, when he had left the Colonel's august presence, said to his comrades laughingly,—

"I'm going to be a 'Bun-puncher,'* lads, till the end of my days."

And so he was.

In due time Suakim was reached, and, though all was bustle and confusion consequent on the expedition, a dreary place it looked; while the heat in the daytime was very great. As we entered the harbour, we passed the cemetery, where many of those at that moment strong and well had a few months later found their last lonely resting-place.

After our arrival, for some unknown reason, we were detained on board ship for two days, much to our irritation. We were kept alive, however, by continual rumours of impending attacks; and at night by the electric lights from H.M.S. *Dolphin*, and from one of the forts of the town, which continually swept round in the direction of the enemy, and as they played over the town and harbour, the numerous camps, and the surrounding country, produced an effect weird and beautiful in the extreme.

Every now and then, too, the stillness would be startled by the crack of a rifle, succeeded, perhaps, by a smart volley or two; attempts on our side to repel a series of well-organized attacks of the enemy, who nightly amused

* Bun-puncher, i.e. Teetotaler, or a member of a Temperance Association.

themselves by creeping up in small parties, unseen to the different camps, whose positions were clearly revealed by the brilliant beam of light. Then they would make a sudden rush on the guards or sentries, and deal death and destruction, only to again retire into the darkness, with but small loss to themselves, and before their presence was fully realized.

On the evening of the second day the joyful intelligence arrived that we were to disembark early next morning, and glad enough we were to hear the news.

I need not weary my readers with any account of the experiences of that day, of the march out to camp, of the want of sufficient transport, of the lack of food and water, of the preparations for defence, and of the numerous other circumstances attendant on the first encamping of troops in a desert and savage country. My story does not deal with any of these matters, but merely with the fate of humble Private Valentine on that first dread night.

. . . . .

It was about 6 p.m. when suddenly "Orderly Sergeants" sounded.

A few minutes afterwards the Orderly Sergeant of Valentine's company arrived with the intelligence that some men were required to

furnish a force for the occupation of some of the small circular redoubts, covering the position of the British force.

These redoubts were situated some seven or eight hundred yards apart, and about an equal distance from the line of camps—if anything so irregular could be called a line. Doubtless, however, the apparent want of method or scheme in the arrangement of the camps at the commencement of operations will be remembered.

The intervening spaces were broken, full of dips and hillocks and clumps of mimosa-bushes, affording innumerable hiding-places in the inky darkness to an enemy acquainted with the ground. Consequently Osman Digna's men were by no means prevented, under cover of the night, from slipping between the redoubts in small parties, in order to make the attacks on the camps previously alluded to.

Yet, for what exact purpose is not clear—with noble disregard of the tactics of the enemy—an order was given that patrols, consisting merely of one N.C.O. and two men, should throughout the night communicate in turn with each redoubt.

After this night there were no more such patrols.

. . . . . .

"Come, hurry up there!" said the Colour Sergeant, who in obedience to the order conveyed to him by the Orderly Sergeant, was superintending the "warning" of the men, who were required on the regimental parade ground in half an hour's time.

"Let's see who's 'for' it. Here, Valentine, you're first for duty! Fall in on the company parade in twenty minutes' time. Great-coat and arms, ammunition will be served out on parade."

Now Valentine, eager for adventure and distinction, had been looking forward keenly to a turn up with the "Fuzzywigs," as they were called, but on his being named so unexpectedly on this occasion, an unaccountable pang shot through his heart.

It almost felt as if the dear letter that lay over it jumped, and he there and then became convinced that he would never see his "Missus" or his pals again.

"All right, Colour Sergeant," he said. "Good-bye!"

"What do you mean, lad?" replied the Colour Sergeant. "There ain't no 'good-bye' about it, I shall see you again to-morrow," and then he added, "I'm right glad you're going, if any one can settle them devils, you can."

"I say, good-bye!" repeated Valentine.

"Oh! well, good-bye! if you *will* have it," he answered, and turned away to go on with his business.

Valentine had no fear—was no coward. He could not have explained why he was so suddenly seized with the notion that he would never survive that night; but so it was, and though his comrades did not think much of it at the time, they remembered afterwards that he had employed the few minutes that remained to him before parade by going through two or three of the tents, and giving them all a parting look.

"Good-bye, lads!" he said, "I shan't see you no more," in his cheeriest and jolliest of tones.

"What's up, Jim?" enquired they.

"Oh, I'm off to the redoubts, that's all! Good luck all! Good-bye, lads!"

To one, however, his tone was different. He sought out his chum, Jack Smithson, and drew him on one side.

"Look ye 'ere, chum," he said, "I'm goin' off on this 'ere business, an' I know as I shan't come back. Stop it now and let me speak"—as the other was going to interrupt him—"I know as wot I say is right, I'm *not* a-comin' back, so it's no good you a-sayin' anythink."

Then he continued in an awed whisper,—

"I wrote to 'er 'afore I left the ship, and told 'er as I'd done what she asked, with a bit of a lock of 'air as she sent me"—and Valentine gulped—"I've got it 'ere with me now—with 'er letter—*'ere*," and he put his brawny hand over his heart. "It shouldn't *never* leave me! Write and tell 'er this, there's a good chum, and say as *I* died 'ard, Jack,—*died 'ard*—a-thinkin' of 'er —*a-thinkin' of 'er*—you won't forget?"

At this moment the company parade call sounded, and with a hasty "Good-bye!" and pressure of the hand, Valentine ran off to join his comrades, before his chum could even reply.

The darkness of that night in the desert was appalling, tangible; never shall I forget it! The colour of the sand seemed to blend with the atmosphere, and to combine in one impenetrable whole. At about 10 p.m. a Corporal, accompanied by Valentine and another, was ordered out to patrol, and to communicate with the remainder of the circular redoubts.

Think of it, my readers! they did not know the position of these redoubts, only their general direction; for they had received orders to occupy their own redoubt too late to ascertain exactly or even see where the remainder lay. They had, therefore, to flounder along over

broken ground with which they were totally unacquainted in the vague hope of establishing the communications required.

When one thinks of it, their object seems almost laughable ; for what good could this wretched little band of men do, even supposing they could reach the remaining redoubts in safety ?

When they started they knew that parties of the enemy had already crept through the line of redoubts, their own having already been fired into, while they had heard several shots and volleys in the direction of the camps. Their only guide was the flashing beam of electric light—also their destruction—for it disclosed them to the enemy as they proceeded, cautiously keeping close to one another, yet constantly stumbling over hillocks, and encountering numerous mimosa-bushes in their path.

Of a sudden the night rang with a wild savage yell, and they realized that seven or eight Soudanese savages were upon them !

The Corporal fired a random shot, but the next moment the soldier on the other side of Valentine fell—stabbed to death.

At that moment the electric light came flashing by, and revealed the weird horror of the spectacle. The yelling savages, in the strange

dress of the Mahdi's uniform, the gleaming spears,—the struggle in the open space,—the dying soldier prostrate on the ground.

As might be expected, the patrol had strayed from the right course; but the scene of the struggle was,—for a second only,—visible in the brilliant light to those in the nearest redoubt, who had been alarmed by the shot.

But what could they do?

There was another shot, then a third; then the sounds of savage cries,—and all was again dark and still.

Meanwhile the light had also, fortunately for him, shown up to the Corporal the direction of the redoubt, from which they were distant about four hundred yards.

He managed to reload, and fire at a savage who was rushing at him.

He killed him, but the next moment, attacked by unseen enemies, he himself fell to the ground, uttering an agonizing cry, wounded in the thigh, and pierced through the jaw,—the latter a terrible and ghastly wound.

Valentine's had hitherto been the most secure position.

He had faced round—for they had been attacked from behind—and fired; and by the help of the electric light he saw a savage fall.

At that moment he also saw his prostrate comrade, who had been the first to fall, and that a couple of savages were stabbing him mercilessly as he lay upon the ground.

The light went by, but filled with a fearful rage and horror he dealt a bayonet thrust at the nearest of them and felt him drop, the dead weight almost wrenching the rifle from his hands.

Next he heard the Corporal's cry and turned towards him, feeling at the same time a sharp pain from a spear-thrust in his left arm, which, however, did not incapacitate him. The Corporal was lying but a few feet away, and in the darkness Valentine stepped upon him; then, gathering from his moans that he was still alive, he stood straddle-legs over him, and determined to save him from the stabs he had seen administered to the first unhappy victim.

"I'm over you," he shouted to the Corporal, and at the same time using the butt-end of his rifle as a club, he felled another savage to the ground, who, however, succeeding in gashing his side with a second spear-thrust.

Valentine was utterly ignorant how many were attacking him, but realizing that he had no chance, now thought of his Maggy, and determined to die hard.

For a moment or two he stood his ground

manfully, and thereby saved the Corporal's life; for the Mahdi's warriors became so infuriated at his stubborn resistance that they concentrated all their attention on him.

Wildly—blindly—in the dark, he struck out with the butt, but he could not see where to aim; and although he knew that his blows took effect, he was finally forced from his protective position over the powerless, but not senseless, non-commissioned officer.

"Make a bolt for it now, Corporal," he again shouted to him.

Then he sprang on one side, whereby for a moment to avoid his enemies, and decoy them after him.

A few steps, and nobly he again faced them, —as they closed in round him.

One more desperate blow,—and then, alas!—forced back by three simultaneous spear-thrusts into a slight dip or depression of the ground,—with a gasp he fell.

. . . . . .

We found him next morning.

The Corporal, who had never lost consciousness, and had taken Valentine's advice, managed to creep back to the redoubt without discovery, having been saved by Valentine's pluck and presence of mind.

A strong search party went out, and after considerable time his comrade was found, but not Valentine.

At day-break we sought for him again with more success. The appearance of the other's body had been horrible enough, but never shall I forget the sight of his!

We found him stiff and stark lying in the little hollow, some ten yards from the scene of the original conflict. He was on his back pinned to the ground by his own bayonet, which the savages had thrust through his two hands, crossed above his heart—a mass of gaping spear-wounds and mutilations.

I cannot describe the latter; they were too many,—too grim in their devilish humour,—too horrible in their vindictiveness; but,—spite of all their horror,—the serene smile upon his face, his hands upon his heart—made one realize that he had died thinking of his "girl," and in the knowledge that his letter—his "Maggy's" dear letter—and her lock of golden hair were safe with him,—safe—close to his heart for ever!

We buried them with him,—the letter and the lock of golden hair.

The bloody bayonet had gone clean through them both, straight—straight to his heart!

He and his comrade rest out there alone in the desert, almost on the spot on which they fell.

. . . . . .

He was but a poor soldier, but surely it is no shame? nay! rather, an *honour* to his comrades,—that the tears of his "Missus"—"Maggy" —were not the only ones that dropped,—to mourn his loss.

'SLIP' AND 'DANDY.'

A ROMANCE OF THE MAGAZINE GUARD.

'SLIP' AND 'DANDY.'

THEY were pals, chums.

They had enlisted together, joined the same regiment at the same time, drilled in the same squad, been posted to the same company, and they slept next to one another in adjoining cots. They were bed chums, townies,[1] and they loved each other like brothers. They would stand by one another in a row or fight to the last extremity; and had they been on active service, or occasion required, would readily have died the one for the other.

Perhaps their code of morality was not of a very exalted order, for neither would hesitate for a moment to tell lies steadfastly if such a course would help the other out of any trouble or disgrace. This, in their opinion, was true comradeship; and so it was, if saving one's chum at the risk of getting into trouble oneself forms any component part of that most estimable and desirable characteristic in a soldier.

[1] Literally, from the same town, but more widely an expression of affection and regard.

Nevertheless, they were fairly honest fellows, were 'Slip' and 'Dandy,' (otherwise Privates Farlow and Burton),—no bigger liars than many other men, all the world over, and true as steel to one another.

For more than two years their life in the regiment ran on in much the same lines, without any break in their 'chumming,' any untoward incident; and during this period both had won the regard and affection of the remainder of their comrades, and had come to be regarded by their Colour Sergeant and the Officer commanding their company as smart, handy men.

Beyond this, however, they had not won any particular distinction; although Slip, who was somewhat better educated than Dandy, had been offered promotion to the rank of Lance Corporal, an appointment that he had refused, since of necessity it would place him in a position of authority over Dandy,—an idea which he did not by any means relish.

He had, therefore, abandoned all thoughts of advancement, and elected to remain, with Dandy, plain 'private' till the completion of his service.

They were both of them tall and broad-shouldered, hard and muscular—fine types of the English soldier,—but roughish diamonds.

They swore frequently, loudly, and heartily—

it relieved their overcharged feelings. They addressed one another by epithets and terms anything but choice, even opprobrious—not in anger, but with friendly familiarity; they would spit at inconvenient moments, and in unsuitable places,—without any apparent reason; and occasionally, though not exactly drunkards, they would share their few shillings pay, go on the spree together, and, coming home 'jolly,' narrowly escape the 'clink.'[1]

They were not patterns, but, for all that, not one whit worse than most civilians of the same class in life from which they had sprung,—and a good deal better than some. For in many men military discipline inculcates habits of obedience, order, cleanliness, and even sobriety, and the 'give-and-take' of a soldier's life tends to unselfishness, open-handedness, and generosity, where otherwise such qualities might be unknown. And so it was with Slip and Dandy, who, inseparable companions, shared, when possible, their duties, and invariably their pleasures, and had no secrets from one another.

They had now been stationed for some months at X——, that large and gloomy garrison town; and there, one evening, when they were out together, they fell in with a girl

[1] Guard-room, where prisoners are confined.

named Betsy Markham, servant to one of the officers in the town.

She was bright, pretty, and attractive, and they both appreciated her company; and for many weeks, on every available opportunity the three went out together; or, if Dandy was on duty, she was to be seen with Slip, and *vice versâ*.

Rumour said that Betsy had previously shown partiality for others dressed in uniform; but this was a matter of indifference to the chums, since she now confined her attentions to them alone, and took up with nobody else.

She was, of course, a coquette—or 'teaser,' Dandy called her—and played with them both, —though to Dandy she showed the greatest favour. He, however, merely found her entertaining and companionable; while Slip, inferior in looks to his comrade, but a smart fellow enough, unfortunately fell in love, and although he had never concealed a thing from him before, told Dandy nothing about it.

There was only one reason for this concealment,—his mistaken belief that Dandy was as far 'gone' on the girl as he was himself, and that if he told him it would be 'all up' with their remaining pals.

He was aided in this belief by Betsy, who

perceiving how the wind lay, in order to gratify her woman's vanity and, by stirring his jealousy, to lead him on, would tell him privately her opinion of Dandy, and all the (frequently invented) sweet things the latter had said to her. Slip therefore manfully determined to see as little of her as possible in future, and to relinquish the game; but his feelings became too strong for him, and one evening, when Dandy was on duty, he went to the gardens to listen to the band, where he knew he would meet her.

There she told Slip that Dandy had promised to marry her; which indeed was the case —a promise she had cajoled him into making.

Slip returned to barracks that night, with an all-consuming desire for Betsy, and a frantic struggle in his rough heart between an awful jealousy of, and yet a deep, honest affection for, his chum. He looked at Dandy who, his great frame stretched out, lay snoring peacefully in his cot; compared mentally, much to his own disadvantage, their mutual attractions; and thinking bitterly how comparatively little of late they had 'palled' with one another, turned in, —to pass a well-nigh sleepless night.

. . . . . .

The following night they were on guard together at the magazine.

It was a lonely spot, down in the marshes, some two hundred yards from the great canal. The guard-room was about sixty yards in rear of the magazine, over which there were two posts for sentries, one on either side of the building. It was cold and gusty, but the moon shone out at times clear and brilliant from between the dark masses of cloud which were ever scudding over its bright surface.

Three or four of them were seated on benches round the fire in the guard-room, talking and smoking. Slip and Dandy were of the number, the first occasion of their ever having served on this particular guard,—one generally recognized as more than usually 'jumpy.'

An older soldier, half-'kidding,'[1] yet himself half-superstitious, was detailing the horrors of being on sentry over the magazine.

"There's a bloke told me as 'ad been on sentry 'ere,—it was on No. 2 Post,—as 'e saw 'im comin' at 'im one night—a horful figger 'e said it was."

The speaker paused for a moment, and taking a cinder from the fire lit his well-coloured clay.

"What was the —— figger like?" asked Slip, with a sniff. "Flesh and blood, I 'xpects," and

[1] Hoaxing.

he spat freely into the fire as if to express his incredulity.

"Yer's so bloomin' wise, ain't yer?" replied the other sneeringly. "But for all yer 'ave got two years service an' a ring,"[1] (a possession the speaker, a soldier who had served six years, could not boast of,) "yer don't know every-think,—not yet. I tell yer, it was a sperrit—flesh an' blood be d—d!—a sperrit,—kinder white, wi' a bloody face on 'im, too. The blood all a tricklin' down—my bloke told me."

"An' what did your bloke do when 'e see this 'ere bloomin' sperrit?" inquired the still un-believing Slip.

"Do? Why, 'e ran off, and 'ollered like 'ell, and they put 'im in the clink for 'drunk'! 'E told me 'e'd drunk nigh on a bottle o' whisky that afternoon—a pal 'ad brought it 'im, without the Sergeant's twigging," added the old soldier, whose nickname was 'Ratty,'[2] with a chuckle.

"A fit of the 'orrers, you bet!" here remarked Dandy. "But, Slip, old towney, what 'ud *you* do if you saw this 'ere sperrit a-comin' at you. You'd shake,—I'll warrant."

[1] Good conduct badge.

[2] 'Ratty,' i.e. constantly drunk. "He's always ratty" (i.e. "always drunk") is a common expression among soldiers.

"Oh, damn shakin'! I'd watch it,"[1] replied Slip, boldly. "I aint afeard. There's not a —— sperrit as ud come near me; but if so be as 'e *did*,—I'd give 'im a bit of cold bayonet for supper. That ud give give 'im the indigestion!"

"I'll wager yer wouldn't! Yer'd run away too, like t' other bloke," said Ratty.

"A tanner on it, then! if you like Ratty, as I'll put my —— bayonet through any —— man —or devil—as comes arter frightenin' me on my post to-night," replied Slip. "But it ain't no good a bettin', as it won't 'appen."

"Done with you!" replied Ratty. "Yer's got a lot o' 'buck,' young man, but for all that, if he *do* visit yer, I'll be —— if I don't win."

"I'll 'ave another tanner on it wi' you too, chummy," said Dandy, laughing. "I'll back you'll be afeard, an' if 'e come to pay you a visit, as you'll run without so much as touchin' on im'."

"Righto!" said Slip. "That's a bob altogether; but in course if nothing 'appens the bloomin' bet's off;" to which remark his companions assented.

The old soldier Ratty now turned in for a sleep on the guard bed, but Slip and Dandy

[1] 'I'd watch it,' i.e. I *wouldn't*.

continued to chat by the fire, in low tones, out of earshot of their companions.

"What's up, chum?" asked Dandy, "you ain't like your bloomin' old self lately. I 'aint scarcely spoke to you for a fortnight. What's up, you old fool?"

"Nought," returned Slip shortly.

Dandy looked at him doubtfully.

"I'll 'ave to liven you up to-morrer some'ow. It's pay day,—we'll 'ave a bit of a spree."

"No good in that! You'll want to be after Betsy, an' it's only wastin' the —— money," replied Slip.

"What? *Wastin'*, for you an' me to 'ave a evenin' together?" answered Dandy. "That ain't like you, Slip! It's better any'ow than buyin' ribbons and things for that teaser! Pull yerself together, man! We'll go an' 'unt up Betsy first, an' take 'er for a bit of a walk; give 'er a squeeze or two, just to show as there's no ill-feelin',—an' end up at the 'Blue Man.' That'll be like it used to be. But I'm —— if I know what's been up with you lately!—though in coorse I seed as you'd got tired of the gal. What is it, 'ave you dropped across another, as is leadin' you a dance? These shemales is a —— rum lot,—the ruin of we soldiers!" he concluded, moralizing.

Slip had looked up quickly at Dandy's suggestion that *he* had got tired of Betsy.

How little his chum knew that he had given up seeing any more of her entirely on his account! But Dandy's position towards the girl was not clear to him. He talked of her in a friendly way certainly, but almost indifferently. Yet he was going to marry her,—Betsy had said so. Why had he not told him?

"No, chum, I ain't dropped across another on em," he answered, "an' I intend to keep clear of the —— sex for a while. An' I won't be for a walk wi' you to-morrer. Two's company, and three's none!—That's a fact."

"What, wi' you an' me!" exclaimed Dandy; "but, all right, my lad, you must do as you please! Then, I'll pass the time with Betsy," he hummed the words to himself, then asked abruptly,—

"Yer've heard about me an' 'er, towney?"

"What?" asked Slip.

"Well, s'help me Gawd! I'd never a thought on it, or I'd a told you. I'm d—d if I didn't think as you was the man she 'ooked on to,—and as *you* 'ooked on to *'er*. I found 'er amusin' an' lively like, an' a nice bit just to pass the evenin' along of. Then you seemed to give up takin'

notice of 'er, an'—she's a —— little teaser!" Dandy paused.

"Well, top up!" said Slip.

"Well, the end on it is, *I'm* agoin' to be 'ooked on to 'er—for good an' all! She regular worried me into it t' other night. I never meant it; but she's saved a bit o' money, and she's a smart bit o' goods herself as you —— well knows,—nice figger an' a' that, an' I likes 'er well enough. Any'ow, it's all settled! She'll do as well as another, and b'lieve me, towney," continued Dandy impressively, "it's better for we soldiers to be tied to *one* woman, even so be as she's 'off the strength,'[1] than to be runnin' arter every —— female we meets,—or carryin' on wi' 'arf a dozen. What *d'you* think?"

"I don't know," answered Slip, pale and sick at heart. So, thought he, he might have had her after all! But now, it was too late!

"When are you goin' to be spliced?" he asked, after a pause, jerking out the question with an effort.

"Soon," answered Dandy.

"Sentry go!" at this moment cried the sentry outside the guard-room, as the clock struck 2 a.m.

[1] I.e. not on the married establishment of the regiment, and therefore not in receipt of any Government allowances.

"Sentry go!" repeated the sergeant of the guard, rising sleepily from his wooden resting-place.

"Corporal! fall in the 'relief'!"

"Chum," said Slip, with a lingering fondness on the word,—yet whispering bitterly in Dandy's ear, as, although to form one of the 'relief,' he still remained on the bench, "I wish you joy on her, an' as 'ow she'll suit you! I thought *you* was so mashed on the gal,—I left 'er to you. She never took to me like she did to you, but some'ow she's crep' in atween me an' you,—damn her! and—Gawd blind me! it's no good lyin' to you! I can't keep chums wi' you no longer."

"What's that? you bloomin' old fool!" cried Dandy, springing up and gazing into Slip's white face. "You never means——You won't let a bit of a petticoat——"

"What are you doin' talkin' there, Farlow? here broke in the Sergeant of the guard. "D'ye think the relief's goin' to wait the whole —— night while you 'as a chat. Fall in and look sharp about it!"

So without another word to Dandy, and with no excuse for his apparent slackness to make to the Sergeant, Slip fell in and was marched off to the magazine, where he relieved the sentry on No. 2 Post.

Dandy looked after his chum, and still sat by the fire.

"Well, I'm ——," he said to himself. "Who'd a' thought it? not this child, any'ow. Poor old Slip! Poor old ——! What a —— old fool! Why didn't 'e tell me? Why! I don't care a cuss for 'er, an'—I'll see her to 'ell, sooner than lose my chum over 'er,—the —— little teaser. She ain't worth that," and he laughed quietly.

His mind was quickly made up.

He begged a bit of paper from the Sergeant, and sitting at the barrack table, wrote as follows:—

"DEAR BETSY,—I opes thisll find you early. It must be all orf atween you an me. I means wot I says that's flat. So it won't be no good your tryin' to come it with me arter or any games of them sort. I'm squared up on it. On considerin of it all I find as you won't suit so shan't see you no more. Tother bloke's the cove for you. Slip's the boy I means. He's orful sweet an'll give yer all he as an' all you wants. He's my chum an' a real good un!! Yer can't do better nor take 'Im. Good-bye.

"Your friend,

"DANDY."

Having written this heartless epistle, he folded it, and put it in the pocket of his great-

coat, with the intention of showing it to Slip before posting it in the morning.

Then he considered,—why shouldn't Slip know all about it now, instead of lettin' the "poor old towney" be miserable for so many hours longer?

It would cheer him on his lonely watch over the magazine.

Why shouldn't he creep out and tell him at once?

Dandy was a man of action, and he determined to chance it; though if he were 'copped,' it must mean a serious business.

He saw that the Sergeant and remainder of the guard were all asleep. Quietly removing his boots, he watched till the sentry over the guard-room had passed the open door and had his back to him, then he slipped out, and round the corner of the guard-house. No one saw him. He then made a slight detour, by which he kept in the dark shadow of the rising ground which culminated in the slight eminence on which the magazine was situated.

Here a thought struck him! Why shouldn't he combine personal profit with his pleasant information?

Slip had bragged in the guard-room that nothing would frighten him on sentry—that he

wasn't afraid of spirits! He'd try him, and win his "tanner"!

Still in the shadow, he took off his great-coat, which, of the usual military pattern, was lined with a white woollen material, and turned it inside out. Then he put it on again, and reflected with grim satisfaction what a gruesome object he must look.

He crept up the slope.

The sentry-box was round the corner at some distance, and he could hear Slip patrolling towards him—Slip, who had no thought or fear of 'sperrits,' but who, while tramping backwards and forwards on his lonely post, had been spending the last half-hour or so in bitterness and agony of mind,—with a wild craving at his heart for the possession of Betsy.

Dandy arrived at the top of the little eminence, then, spreading out his arms, he turned the corner, and advanced slowly towards the sentry, —a terrifying object in the bright rays of the moon.

Slip was about ten yards from him, and coming to the 'halt,' challenged the advancing figure; at first, in spite of his previous bold words, greatly astonished and frightened.

He received no reply to his challenge.

Then he recollected the recent conversation

in the guard-room with Ratty and Dandy, and the tanners they had wagered, and he promptly recovered his self-possession.

Was one of them 'skylarking' in order to prove him? Well, he'd have the laugh of them! He'd stand firm!

"So that's your game, is it?" he asked, as Dandy drew nearer, and speaking in a low tone for fear of causing an alarm.

"You bloomin' old ——, thinkin' you'd gammon me! Halt! chum, I *knows* you!"

And he laughed cheerily as he stood there with his rifle at the charge.

But his chum had advanced fearlessly, and was now within two paces of him.

Then considering that he'd got the 'washout,' as he would himself have put it, (i.e. had been defeated in his object of frightening his pal), Dandy opened his mouth to speak,—

"You've a good plu—," began he,—but the remaining words died on his lips.

An awful, sudden change had come over Slip's previously smiling face,—plainly visible in the brilliant light. A look as if *the Devil* had suddenly taken possession of his soul!

Did he remember Betsy?

Dandy hesitated—would have fled—but it was too late!

Slip had thrust home, and pierced him to the heart!

. . . . .

Three minutes afterwards, the sentry on No. 1 post, hearing strange sounds proceeding from the opposite side of the magazine, extended his beat with the object of seeing if anything was wrong, and if necessary, giving the alarm.

He found Slip on his knees, half-demented, weeping and moaning over Dandy's dead body.

When he recovered himself later, they showed him Dandy's letter to Betsy, which was found in the great-coat pocket.

Slip had won his 'tanner,'—and the girl too, if he liked.

But he never married her—never met her again.

For through her he had lost Dandy—had lost his 'chum!'

'THE BLACK DEVIL.'

THE BLACK DEVIL.'

CHAPTER I.

"UPON my word, I feel nearly at my wits' end, Leslie! What *is* to be done?"

The Colonel lived some way out of the town, but, early in the day, had arrived in barracks for his morning's work, and had just heard the news.

"We have already taken every possible step, sir," replied Captain Leslie, the Adjutant. "I informed the police the first thing this morning. Every pawnshop will be ransacked, and a watch is being kept on all persons leaving the town either by train or road; if nothing is found out before this evening, a telegram will be sent to London for detectives."

"Pity they haven't telegraphed for them already, I think," replied the Colonel, "now it is impossible for them to be here until to-morrow,

and we don't know what may happen before then."

"I suppose the local police won't like to own themselves beaten sooner than necessary, sir. They offered to send some men into barracks to-night, but I said I did not think they would be required. I think they would only be in the way, and that we can take our own precautions."

"Quite right," rejoined the Colonel. "Soldiers mustn't be thought incapable of looking after themselves, though I confess I feel thoroughly nonplussed."

He looked anxious and worried, as did also Captain Leslie, in whose good sense Colonel Hartland placed every reliance.

"What orders have you given for to-night?" he asked.

"I have ordered the picquet to be again posted in the barrack square, and patrols to be sent out round the mess and barracks, and the guard will be considerably increased at 'retreat' in order that all the sentries may be doubled. It's a terrible tax on the men, sir; there are so few available for duty; but there's nothing else to be done!"

"It is indeed pretty rough on them now the draft has gone; but if the thief is a soldier, it may lead to some of his comrades splitting on

him. He is sure to have accomplices; but my impression is that this has not been done by one of our men at all, and that 'the Black Devil' as they call him, is already off—plate and all. I am so sorry for you too, my dear fellow," he continued, "losing all your valuable trophies. It is devilish hard lines on the whole Regiment, but particularly so on you."

"It can't be helped, sir," said Leslie. "We must only hope that we shall get the things back. I think the two sentries have had the worst luck!"

"Yes, poor beggars; I hope they'll get over it. By Jove! They ought to give it the scoundrel hot, if they catch him! He deserves it for the fiendish mischief he's done,—frightening and nearly murdering these poor devils of sentries in order to carry out a robbery of this kind. What I can't make out is how he has been able to have such a terrifying effect on the men, and assault them continually without being caught. I'm deuced glad of one thing, though—that it's proved now that all this business has been the work of nothing more than a thief, and that we've got rid, once for all, of this superstitious rot about 'the Black Devil.' But I'm bound to say the whole thing is very extraordinary, and I'm damned if I can make it out!"

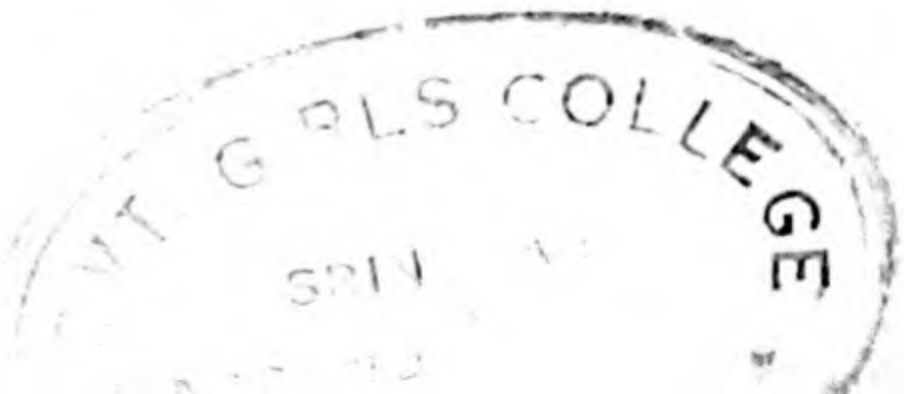
The Colonel brought his fist down emphatically upon the Orderly Room table, and leant back in his office chair with a blank look upon his face.

For some time past—it was now the beginning of November—the barracks at the small garrison town of P—— had been subjected to a series of nightly visitations and outrages of a most unpleasant and alarming character.

In spite of determined efforts, however, no clue whatever to the author of these outrages had been discovered; and though many of the soldiers were said to have seen and heard him, only his unfortunate victims—chiefly sentries—were able to give anything like a description of him.

Their accounts of his appearance were identical. It was that of a tall figure, enveloped in a voluminous black garment, whose face was not distinguishable; only the eyes, stony and fixed or 'dead,' as one of the men called them, being visible.

Such being his description, it can be easily understood that the soldiers, naturally prone to superstition, soon firmly believed in the ghostly and evil nature of this creature, and speedily dubbed their mysterious visitor 'the Black Devil.'



At the commencement the Colonel and the officers had of course ridiculed the suggestion of this creature's spiritual origin.

The first man who had been attacked had been brought up as a prisoner charged with being, when on sentry, 'drunk on his post.'

He denied, strenuously, however, having had any liquor at all, and the Sergeant of the Guard, who had found him in a hysterical condition, lying on the ground with his rifle a few feet from him, declared that when posted half an hour previously he had been perfectly sober.

Since—when he had discovered him—the Sergeant could get no explanation out of the man, he had concluded that he was drunk, and had accordingly confined him in the guard-room; though by what means a sentry could have obtained liquor at that hour, 2.30 a.m., was a mystery. It was only in the morning, when the soldier had recovered his senses sufficiently to be able to give an account of what had happened to him, that the Sergeant, an old and trustworthy non-commissioned officer, had thought his story so extraordinary that he had at once reported it to the Adjutant; with the result that, as the soldier now showed no sign of having been in a state of drunkenness, he was immediately

brought before the Colonel, instead of waiting for the usual twenty-four hours.[1]

The Commanding Officer, however, took a different view of the matter, and was much vexed at this exceptional course.

He declared that it was evident that the man, if not drunk, had been drinking, or suffering from the effects of drink; and that his ridiculous story of having been suddenly set upon by a black figure, who, having torn his rifle from him, chuckled fiendishly and glared in his face, was nothing but the creation of a drink-disordered brain.

As, however, this could not be actually proved against him, he was dismissed with a stern caution 'not to do it again,' and the Colonel thought no more of the matter.

When, however, the following morning it was again reported to him that Private Mallerton, who had been on sentry over the Officers' Mess, had also been attacked during the night and found lying senseless near his sentry-box, and that others declared they had both heard and seen 'the Black Devil,' the Commanding Officer

[1] Except under exceptional circumstances, a soldier charged with drunkenness is not brought before the Commanding Officer until twenty-four hours have elapsed from the time he is made a prisoner.

was much puzzled, and wondered if he had been mistaken the previous day.

Private Mallerton (with whom we shall become better acquainted), having recovered his normal condition, was sent for and interviewed.

He seemed much ashamed of himself, and was very apologetic for having so completely lost his presence of mind and his senses. For this same Mallerton, though not a very tall man, was very powerful, and had a great reputation in the Regiment as 'a bit of a bruiser' and an athlete all round. He was a steady fellow too, and, though he took a glass of beer occasionally, was not a hard drinker.

The Adjutant, Captain Leslie, knew him well, and that he was to be thoroughly trusted; for formerly Mallerton had been his servant—a post, however, voluntarily given up some months previously in consequence of a wish for more freedom and more time to himself.

This man felt that by having been found senseless he had lost his reputation for pluck in the Regiment; more especially so, since in the guard-room (when he and some of his comrades had been talking over the events of the previous night), he had declared loudly his disbelief in ghosts or devils, and his determination to 'do for' such should they molest *him* when on sentry.

On being interrogated, however, he stuck to the truth of his story; which was to the effect that, about 1 a.m., shortly after the Sergeant had gone round the sentries to see that all was correct, he was 'standing at ease' outside his sentry-box. He had heard no sound, when, on turning his head, he suddenly saw at his side a tall black figure gazing fixedly at him.

He started and clutched his rifle, but before he could bring it to the charge, with a chuckle of derision the figure sprang upon him, and shook him like a rat in its merciless grasp. He struggled to free himself—ineffectually; and terrified out of his wits, soon collapsed, although he never loosed his hold of the rifle, to which he was still clinging when discovered insensible.

"It give me a shock, sir—awful," he added, at the conclusion of his story to the Colonel, "though I didn't ought to 'ave gone off like that; but it came on me so sudden like, an' I never 'eard nothin' till I saw 'im close beside me—an' it was so strong I felt quite 'elpless, sir."

"I'm not surprised at the effect upon you—if it's not all your own imagination," replied the Colonel. "But now that you can think over the matter calmly, can you give me any idea of who this creature was, and its object in so attacking you?"

It's 'uman sir—'uman, and mighty powerful, too, sir. I felt the grip of 'im as plain as possible, and it warn't nothin' but a man. I thinks as 'ow it's someone dressed up—just for a lark, sir."

And in this sensible opinion the Colonel and the Adjutant concurred.

Captain Leslie as Adjutant had at once taken every possible precaution.

A picquet was ordered to mount in the Barrack square, patrols were sent out, and sentries doubled, but the sentries were still terrified nightly.

The greater, indeed, the efforts to prevent the continuance of such occurrences or to discover their perpetrator, the greater became the boldness of 'the Black Devil.' Nor, although occasionally seen, could he ever be in the slightest degree traced, while his pranks became more terrifying and more mysterious. He would frequently leap suddenly on some sentry from nowhere; or (apparently thoroughly acquainted with their movements), he would appear by the side of the patrols, greeting them with unearthly laughter; then, if sufficient presence of mind was left them to attempt his capture, he would as suddenly disappear in the darkness of the night.

By this means the troops in barracks became thoroughly under the influence of a superstitious terrorism—all the more convincing as there seemed to be no reason for these strange occurrences—no consequences—no attempted robbery even—and they all firmly believed that they were the sport of an unearthly visitant.

To the infection of this terrorism the officers, even the Colonel himself, became subjected—the circumstances were so strange, so uncanny—but they carefully concealed their nervousness from the men.

Suddenly, about a fortnight before the date of the commencement of this story, the outrages—visitations—call them what you will—of 'the Black Devil' ceased.

During this period the alarm caused had gradually subsided, although the Adjutant was wise enough to continue his extra precautions. At the end of the fortnight, however, a very large draft of the Regiment left to join the battalion serving abroad, and (as the furnishing of extra guards and picquets became very irksome for those left behind, in consequence of reduced numbers), Captain Leslie had urged the advisability of only posting one extra sentry over the Officers' Mess, which made two in all, in that quarter.

The Colonel had given his consent; concluding that, if the previous outrages had been committed by any of his men, their originator was probably among those who had left in the draft, which consisted of a large percentage of (so-called) old soldiers. He did not think it likely that 'the Black Devil' would be numbered among the younger men left behind.

He, however, cautioned his Adjutant to mount on this first night of relaxed vigilance, a specially selected Guard of the oldest and steadiest men still serving under him at P——.

The strange consequences that had ensued were the subject of the conversation between the Colonel and the Adjutant quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

What had happened the previous night was briefly as follows.

When the Corporal of the Guard was on his way to relieve the sentries over the mess at 4 a.m., he received no challenge from either of the sentries. He called out the number of the first sentry's post, but received no answer. At once suspecting that something was wrong, he proceeded with the soldiers of 'the relief' to search for the man, whom he shortly discovered in a state bordering on suffocation, fastened to some iron railings by means of

his belt, which was tied round his neck, while his hands were also secured by a handkerchief. The poor fellow, in addition to his inability to breathe or move, was in a state of hopeless terror.

Having sent a man back to inform the Sergeant of the Guard, the Corporal then searched for the second sentry.

This man he found lying unconscious, gagged with a handkerchief, coatless, and half naked, his soldier's flannel shirt torn off his back, with strips from which his legs and arms were bound.

From the marks in the ground, it was evident that here there had been a severe struggle, the noise of which it was strange had not attracted attention; since, although the guard-room was at a distance, some of the officers' quarters were close adjoining. When, however, the unfortunate victim of this outrage recovered his wits some weeks later, he explained that the gag had been so suddenly forced into his mouth from behind, that he had been unable to cry out, and that at the same time he had been seized in a vice-like grasp. He had realized immediately that his assailant was 'the Black Devil,' and had struggled desperately with him, but, unable to breathe, had been overpowered, and knew no more.

But this was not all that occurred that night.

The Sergeant of the Guard had, in a state of dismay, at once gone to the Adjutant's quarters to report the circumstances.

Leslie arose, with a view to taking immediate steps, and, while hurriedly putting on his clothes, had discovered that since he had retired to rest his room had been ransacked, and stripped of all the valuable silver cups and trophies it contained.

If not found, these would be a terrible loss; for he was one of the greatest athletes in the army, and the winner in many important competitions.

The whole Barracks were now alarmed and a general search ordered; with the result that the Officers' Mess Sergeant, who, hearing of Leslie's loss, had felt full of misgivings, found to his horror, that a large quantity of the mess plate had also disappeared.

But search as they did that night, in every barrack-room, in every nook and corner of the barracks, there was no trace of the plate, no sign of 'the Black Devil'—the fear of the men for whom, (now that his motives were fully understood,) yielded to indignant wrath, which augured ill should his mysterious personality by any means come into their power.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN LESLIE was sitting in the Orderly Room that afternoon about five o'clock. He looked careworn, worried and ill, nor did the news contained in the telegram lying open before him, (which announced that he had successfully passed the examination for the Staff College,) remove the air of depression from his face.

To pass this examination had been his one ambition; he had worked for it, striven for it, and now when he knew of his success his mind felt so troubled about other matters, he scarcely cared about it.

The most searching inquiries had been prosecuted all day, but not a clue had been discovered, suspicion had fallen on no one.

Who was the author of the robbery, and the identity of 'the Black Devil' was still an impenetrable mystery; and the police of P—— had confessed themselves baffled, and had wired to London for detectives.

The Adjutant was leaning his head wearily on

his hand, when he was aroused by a knock at the door.

"Beg pardon, sir," it was the regimental Sergeant-Major who spoke, "but Private Mallerton wants to see you."

"Private Mallerton?" asked Leslie in surprise. "What does he want?"

"I don't know, sir. He won't tell me. He only says he wants to speak to you very particular, and I thought you'd see him."

"Very well. March him in."

"Well, Mallerton, what is it?" he asked, as the Sergeant-Major halted the soldier in front of his table.

Mallerton shifted and coughed uneasily,

"It's about this 'ere 'Black Devil,' sir," he replied. "But if you don't object, sir," and he lowered his voice, "may I shut the door? It won't matter the Sergeant-Major hearing, but I'd rather them orderlies outside didn't."

"Certainly, you can close the door." Then, as Mallerton returned to his place, Leslie continued incredulously:

"But what about 'the Black Devil' as you call him? I suppose you haven't got any clue to him?—Though it will be a good thing for you if you have, as the officers are going to offer a good reward for the recovery of the mess

plate; and I am going to add something to it, for my share."

"No, sir, I 'aven't got no clue to him and I wasn't thinkin' of a reward—but I wants to find him," replied the soldier determinedly.

"So does everybody, Mallerton," and the Adjutant smiled, fixing his eye on the soldier, however, in a way that made him feel extremely uncomfortable.

"I 'ope, sir, you don't think as *I've* 'ad anything to do with all this as 'as been going on?' asked Mallerton, nervously. "But you'll remember, sir, 'e went for me more than a fortnight ago, and I wants to go for *'im* now, and I haven't had the chance yet."

"I should have thought you'd had enough of him; but your turn for guard or picquet will be sure to come round soon, and if he's still anywhere about, you'll get a chance at him then."

"My turn won't come for a day or two yet, sir. If 'e's a thief, sir, you may be sure 'e won't be in barriks then, though I 'xpects he *is* now; and when you're on sentry or patrol, sir, 'e always knows where you are and can be prepared for you. What I wants to do is to watch for him quite alone—by myself like—where he nor nobody 'll know where I am—*then* I may catch him."

Captain Leslie again looked keenly at Mallerton. Then after a moment's consideration he said:

"Well, you're a plucky fellow, Mallerton, and I'm inclined to agree to your proposal. But what makes you think he's still in barracks?"

"'E's either in barriks or the town, I thinks, sir. In course, I may be mistaken, but I expects 'e determined on that robbery on a sudden like last night, 'earin' as the sentries was reduced; and there was too much stuff for 'im to get it all away without bein' noticed, unless 'e'd made proper arrangements beforehand. It's most likely 'e'll have planned some'ow to-day to get it off to-night."

"Upon my word, you're uncommonly sharp! What do you think about it, Sergeant-Major?" asked Leslie, turning to that functionary.

"I think there's a deal in what Private Mallerton says, sir," answered he. "It's quite likely the thief has not had the means of getting rid of the things, and that they are still hidden in barracks. I think too, sir, that if they'd been got away, we should have traced some of them by this; but of course there's no knowing, these burglars is so terrible 'cute, sir."

"I daresay what you say is true enough. But what do you think of Mallerton's plan of

watching for him by himself? Is there any good in it?"

"Well, yes, sir, I think there may be," replied the Sergeant-Major. "There's no doubt this 'Black Devil' finds out where the sentries and patrols are, and how to be on the look-out for them; while if Mallerton was concealed in some place that no one knows nothing of, he might just catch him."

So the end of Mallerton's interview with the Adjutant was that that officer—in the absence of the Colonel—took the responsibility of granting his request.

The spot selected as a hiding-place was a bed of shrubs and young trees, at the back of which ran a wall forming an angle with that of the Officers' Mess. At this angle there was a doorway leading round to the back of the Mess premises, and a clear space of a few feet before the commencement of the bed before alluded to. As on the further side there was a piece of waste town land, it was assumed that 'the Black Devil' and his accomplices (if any) might attempt to scale the wall and to make off with their booty at this point, especially if the space were left apparently unguarded. It was arranged, therefore, to slightly alter the sentry's post, which was usually hard by; though the sentry was

not to be informed that Mallerton was to be concealed in the bed of shrubs, close to the corner.

The patrols would in the ordinary course of their duty pass the place selected, and go through the doorway; but the only persons acquainted with Mallerton's hiding-place or with the fact that he was to be on the watch at all, were the Adjutant, the Sergeant-Major, and the Sergeant of the Picquet; the latter of whom, it necessary, he was to call to his assistance by means of a whistle with which he was to be provided.

The object of not informing anyone else was, of course, the danger of his experiment becoming spread abroad, and the possible consequent warning of 'the Black Devil.'

Any vague suspicions that the Adjutant might have entertained towards Mallerton were apparently dispelled by the end of the interview, and, the preliminaries having been satisfactorily arranged, the soldier was about to leave the Orderly Room, when Leslie said:

"Well, I wish you good luck, Mallerton! I'm afraid, though, 'the Black Devil' will be too sharp for you, and that he won't give you the chance of collaring him; but if you *do*, the whole Regiment will be indebted to you, and you needn't be

afraid of your reputation for 'pluck' then. I don't think you ought to take what happened to you the other night so much to heart—you couldn't help it. By-the-bye, what weapon are you going to have? I'm afraid the Colonel wouldn't wish you to have a revolver."

"I'd rather have a good, thick stick than anything, thank you, sir," answered Mallerton; "and I'm sure I'm much obliged to you for letting me do what I want, sir; but I can't get over what he done to me t'other night, and, if I gets 'old of him, I assure you, sir, I do feel as I'd like to *kill* him, sir."

"Well, take care he doesn't kill *you;* though there will be plenty of us on the look-out to give you assistance if necessary."

"I'll watch that, sir. 'E won't catch me unawares this time," and with a salute the soldier withdrew.

"If he does happen to come across 'the Black Devil' I'm afraid he'll have his work cut out; but he's a plucky fellow," remarked the Adjutant to the Sergeant-Major as Mallerton left the Orderly Room.

"He is indeed, sir,—and a strong one too. I think if he ain't taken off his guard, even 'the Black Devil' will have a toughish job to tackle him, sir."

. . . . . .

Mallerton concealed himself among the shrubs after 'first post.'[1]

He was somewhat strangely clad, but his attire had been left to his own discretion. For bodily freedom he had discarded his uniform serge coat and wore a stout blue jersey over his flannel shirt, no braces, and a plain leather belt round his middle. On his feet were a pair of cheap tennis shoes; since, if he saw 'the Black Devil' it might be necessary to give chase noiselessly. In his hand he carried a stout ash plant, and round his neck the whistle. It was by no means a cold night for the time of year; though, as he might possibly have to stand in the bushes for several hours, he would have preferred to wear his great-coat. He, however, feared to encumber himself, so trusted to the sufficient warmth of his shirt and jersey.

No one had seen him hide.

He had avoided the sentry and slipped through the doorway in the angle of the wall, and now he was quietly and determinedly waiting. He thirsted for revenge upon 'the Black Devil' for the fools he had made of him and of the whole Regiment, and was not without a keen anticipation of the glory

[1] 9.30 p.m.

which would accrue to him should he succeed in his object,—for then he could not fail to become a regimental hero.

At first his vigil was not otherwise than lively, for there were lights in the Officers' Ante-room and Mess Room, and in their respective quarters; but gradually these disappeared and the veil of night gathered round him. A gas lamp had illuminated the narrow adjoining doorway, but this was extinguished at 11 p.m. as usual; and the spot at which he considered it not unlikely that the thief would endeavour to escape with the stolen plate was hidden in the impenetrable gloom.

The moon would not rise until about 2 a.m., though its actual rays could not penetrate to the angle of the wall until considerably later, and the soldier calculated that advantage would be taken of the darkness before that hour.

So he watched, and watched, but he heard nothing, saw nothing; yet he never moved from his post.

Twelve o'clock struck, one o'clock, two o'clock!

The most dangerous time was past, the dim light of the moon was spreading, but nevertheless he determined to remain where he was until the morning.

Who knew what might yet occur?

He shivered with cold, and began to think his was a fool's errand. He had seen the patrols go past, could hear the sentry on his post, but—nothing happened; no sign of the thief or thieves—of 'the Black Devil'—anywhere!

Then he thought he heard a slight noise. Was he being watched? Were they waiting till he was tired out to carry out their schemes?

It was nothing—only his imagination.

Should he give up his vigil and go to bed?

No! he would only be laughed at for his pains.

He would *not* give in!

A terrible, overpowering sleepiness came over him. For a moment he leant his head against a tree. He slept—half a minute perhaps—no more. Then he awoke with a start.

Someone had touched him! He could swear it!

He was wide enough awake now.

He listened—strove to penetrate the gloom of the corner. No sound—nothing to be seen—and yet he had an indescribable sensation that there was someone near him.

Then within a few feet of him he heard a low, unearthly chuckle of derision.

He remembered the last time he had heard

that sound, and shuddered! He knew it was 'the Black Devil'—close beside him.

Again that low, fiendish chuckle! Could there be anything more unearthly, more ghastly than its sound?

He was trembling all over! But it did not frighten him for long; for he remembered it could only be a man—a thief—whom he had deliberately determined to tackle.

He had then after all been right in his conclusion! Here was the object of his search at the very spot at which he had expected him!

He took a step forward. There was the sound again—a little farther off! 'The Black Devil' was on the gravel path, he could see him now distinctly! He made a spring—then looked round helplessly,—he had lost him!

No! He was there! He could see him in that doorway opposite, leading up to the officers' quarters. He gave chase. 'The Black Devil' was on the stairs! He still heard the ghastly laugh above him.

He pursued up two flights, until he arrived at a long broad passage with rooms on either side. Here all was silent and dark. What if the object of his pursuit should escape him after

all? He hurried down the passage, but could neither hear nor see anything.

What had become of 'the Black Devil'? Had he *already* escaped—got past him while he ran down the passage?

It was quite possible, but surely he was not doomed to so great a disappointment?

Then it dawned on him that he had probably been made a fool of. He recollected the sound that he had heard while waiting in the bed of shrubs, before he had so foolishly been overcome with sleep. No doubt he had been discovered in his hiding-place, and decoyed away while another got rid of the plate! By this time, probably, 'the Black Devil' was back there again, and assisting his accomplice! Oh! what a fool he had been!

He turned to hurry back, when again he heard a laugh of derision.

It seemed almost as if his thoughts had been divined. The laugh was louder—more triumphant. It came from some spot close by, but he could not discover where.

He then perceived that he was close to some officer's quarters and that the door was ajar. Had the sound come from that room? Yes! He was convinced of it.

The 'Black Devil was *there!*'

He entered the room very quietly and quickly, closing the door behind him, and smiling triumphantly to himself.

Now, thought he, 'the Black Devil' shall settle accounts with *me!*

CHAPTER III.

THE light of the moon had already penetrated the gloom of the room.

As Mallerton shut the door, which closed with a patent spring-lock, he perceived the object of his search standing a few paces from him, and to his surprise it made no effort to pass him or to escape.

There, standing strangely motionless, he perceived a tall, powerful-looking figure clothed in a voluminous black garment, its face shrouded in a cowl, from which a pair of stony eyes stared at him in a horrible, fixed manner.

What was it—a man? or, after all—was it a *devil?*

So the figure stood for a moment; then, taking a step forward, with a sudden movement, it tore off the cowl from its face, and there—revealed to the astonished soldier—awful and horrible in its expression of demoniacal triumph—was the pallid and appalling visage of—*the Adjutant—Leslie!*

Mallerton started back horror-stricken !

The sight before him was so utterly unexpected—so terrible ! His senses reeled. Surely it was some awful hallucination, some fearful nightmare !

Then, as the figure remained motionless before him—as Mallerton gazed into those eyes—the soldier gradually realized that it was no dream —no hallucination ; that the Adjutant, his late master to whom he was much attached, and 'the Black Devil' were—*one*—that he was alone—*alone !*—closeted with a *madman*—a madman of exceptional bodily strength !

In the moment left him in which to think, Mallerton saw it all—understood it all.

All the previous outrages had been acts of madness in their devilish ferocity. But the madman had been enabled, (and it is well known that in certain cases such a power is by no means unusual), to control himself except at particular seasons, to be apparently sane when in reality most mad—to plot, to calculate—yet to stay his hand.

Leslie had plotted that day in the Orderly Room—had plotted with fiendish silent glee to entice Mallerton to his room—there to revel in the knowledge that he was in his power.

The soldier had *dared* to try to stop his nightly

pranks! to watch him—*the madman!* to wish to be revenged on *him*—*'the Black Devil'!*

He knew the soldier's hiding-place—*his* should be the revenge!

Mallerton's first impulse was to rush to the window and shout for assistance, but the madman anticipated him and barred the way. He turned to the door—Leslie was there before him! Then he remembered his whistle—*it was gone!*

This then was the explanation of the impression he had had when he awoke from his short sleep—that someone had touched him. Leslie had robbed him of it as he slept.

He felt now that he was helpless—lost; for he could have no chance in a struggle with a maniac, such as stood before him—whose strength he knew only too well.

The sound of hideous laughter put the horror of the situation even more plainly before him.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Leslie. "Where's your whistle? Where is it? Won't you shake hands with me? *Mine* are not bloody yet—*not yet.* Do you know Captain Leslie—Adjutant and Black Devil? Ha! ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!"

Mallerton shivered at the madman's glee.

"But, I forgot, I want you to be my guest,"

he continued, in softer tones, "I've brought you up here to—to supper. I've a glorious sight to show you! Ah! such a sight!"

Then succeeded a number of mutterings.

"Do you know I'm mad? *mad*—as *hell?*" he suddenly asked, in a quick, low tone, hissing out the words with fierce delight, and seizing Mallerton by the shoulders. Then he whispered hurriedly:

"They're coming! They're coming! Hundreds of them! Thousands of them—to save you! I can hear them! I can hear them!" and he stopped as if listening for a moment. "No! no! Not yet! Not yet! Plenty of time! plenty of time!"

It may be thought strange that ere this Mallerton had not again attempted to obtain assistance, but he was sharp enough to see the danger of so doing.

He had now—terrified though he was—nerved himself for the task before him, and he considered that his wisest plan would be to endeavour by some stratagem to gain the advantage. If he were to shout for help, it would be of little use, unless he could open the window; while the madman would at once understand his reason for so doing, and might have time to either kill or injure him

seriously before assistance could arrive. He therefore decided to remain quiet, and to soothe, if possible, or ingratiate himself with, the madman, until he could take him unawares, and find some opportunity of escaping or of getting the better of him.

Accordingly, when Leslie seized him by the shoulders, he did not attempt to resist, but only grasped his stick the firmer, in readiness to strike if necessary.

"Look! look!" and the Adjutant led Mallerton to the partition which divided the bedroom from the sitting-room, "There's plenty for us to drink out of at supper, ha! ha! ha! Nobody knows where it all is—only *you'll* know now—only *you*. Look! look!" and there before the soldier's astonished eyes, laid out upon the bed, was the missing plate.

It was roughly arranged, salvers and trophies in the middle, and round the sides, as if at places to be occupied by different guests, some of the regimental, and all Leslie's own, cups. In confusion on the floor near the bed were many other silver articles. In the room there was a big old oak chest, which was open; and Mallerton saw that after Leslie had completed his burglary the previous night, (which must have been most cleverly planned and carried out), the

plate had been concealed therein, (his own as well as the Mess property), whence it was now again brought forth—gloated over, and ostentatiously displayed.

"It's all mine—mine," he said. "Oh! it's splendid to see them hunting for it, but they don't know that it's *mine*," and he chuckled again with delight. "But do you see that I'm going to have a party? My friends here," and he waved his hand towards the vacant places, "have only been waiting for you to come—in order to begin."

Then for the first time Mallerton spoke, tentatively, and with the idea of trying to become friendly:

"I see no one else, sir," he said quietly.

"Don't you?" replied Leslie. "Oh, they're all here. I must introduce you—I forgot. Ladies and gentlemen," he went on to his imaginary companions, in a gay, bantering tone, "this is my faithful friend—Private Mallerton—who has come to have supper with us. He has long been a faithful friend to me; but he *watched* me—and—ha! ha! ha! we shall reward him—ha! ha! ha! He has come for his reward! He must drink 'success to all madmen!' —and we must drink *his* health. What are we to give him?"

He bent his head, as if consulting his guests, and paused,—

"The Loving-cup?" again he cried exultantly," yes! the *Loving*-cup—of blood! *His own blood!* Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

It was evident that the idea of his victim's blood had mastered him completely, and Mallerton saw that matters were coming to a crisis. Horrified at the last words—at the wild and awful shriek of laughter—he began to regret not having previously made some more strenuous effort to escape, and doubted whether he had acted wisely; but he now perceived that the small window in the bedroom was open, and he congratulated himself that possibly the awful sound might have been heard, and thereby become the herald of assistance. Then, as all became again still, he saw Leslie, who had hitherto never relaxed the grasp on his shoulder, put out his hand and snatch a razor from the dressing-table.

An inspiration struck the soldier simultaneously with this action. He burst into a fit of laughter apparently as uncontrollable, as wild, as that of Leslie, and shouted out,—

"Blood! Ha! ha! My own blood! That's fine! Ha! ha! ha!"

The effect on Leslie was instantaneous. His

victim did not fear him—was he mad also? His hands dropped.

In an instant Mallerton had taken advantage of his momentary freedom—of the madman's hesitation, and had leapt over the bed, and taken up a position with his back against the wall of the room.

Leslie, perceiving that he had been tricked, uttered a howl of disappointed rage. Standing upon the bed, he prepared to throw himself upon the soldier. The latter, fearing the razor, and seeing that it must be got rid of at all hazards, aimed a blow and struck it out of his hand with the stick. It fell upon the bed at the distance of a few feet; but 'the Black Devil' did not wait to recover it.

Like a tiger he sprang at Mallerton, who had just time to hold up his stick horizontally in front of him, and catch the madman on the chest. The sudden resistance thus offered, (if the stick had only caught him a little higher up it would have broken his neck), threw Leslie upon the bed amid the plate; and Mallerton, quick as lightning, seized his opportunity. He again leapt the bed, while the Adjutant, rendered helpless for a moment, was struggling to rise. The soldier got behind him, and, seizing the black garment with which he

was clothed, no other than an old black domino, bought in saner times, he drew it rapidly upwards and twisted it over the head of his antagonist, at the same time shouting for help with all his might.

But, alas, for Mallerton! his stratagem was of little avail; for the domino was old and rotten, and the frantic struggles of the madman were too much for it to bear, and it suddenly tore to ribbons in the soldier's hands, leaving Leslie with his arms free,—less encumbered than before; while the sudden relaxation of the strain threw Mallerton backwards upon the floor between the table and the fireplace, and his only weapon, his stick, fell from his hand.

Now the madman, with a yell of triumph, and grinding his teeth with rage, is kneeling over him, his hands about his throat! But Mallerton (himself temporarily endowed with almost maniac's strength), with a superhuman effort, managed to force the hands back for a moment, and to rise to a sitting posture; then, relaxing his hold with his own right hand, he dealt Leslie a terrific blow in the face, which sent him reeling, whereby he succeeded in getting upon his feet.

Before the soldier, however, could once more

put his back against the wall of the room—which he deeply regretted having ever left—with, if possible, increased fury, Leslie again sprang at him, and seized him round the middle.

Truly awful was the scene of the ensuing struggle, for the moon now shone fully into the room, and poured its rays on those mad eyes, that set drawn face, those gleaming, grinding teeth.

When Leslie had fallen backwards on the bed, he had struck his head against the sharp edge of one of the silver salvers, which had wounded him just above the temple, and the blood was flowing down his face. Some of it, too, had got upon Mallerton's despairing countenance, and enhanced its wild and ghastly expression,—but little less ghastly than that of Leslie.

Backwards and forwards they swayed, uttering no word, no sound. Nothing was to be heard save the shuffling of their unshod feet upon the carpet, their hard breathing. But with all his strength the madman could not throw the soldier, could not lift him off his feet.

Those minutes seemed hours, but at last Mallerton suddenly felt his strength failing him, and that Leslie was crushing the very life out of him. With one supreme attempt he tightened his grasp for a second, and again strove to trip up his

antagonist; but the next moment his hands relaxed, and he fell heavily to the floor.

Instantly the madman's hands were once more at his throat. Then, perceiving that his victim was powerless to rise, he laughed, and muttered to himself,—

"Blood! Ha! ha! A cup of blood!"

Keeping the grip of a vice upon the soldier's neck, he now commenced to drag him across the floor. The latter guessed his purpose, concluding rightly that the madman intended to regain possession of the razor and to cut his throat. He therefore clung desperately to the legs of the heavy oak chest with which he came in contact, and in spite of every effort, Leslie was unable to tear him from it, until at last the piece of furniture fell, crushing Mallerton beneath it.

Then there was the sound of men outside advancing "at the double," and of voices upon the stairs, and, (in terrible agony from his arm, which had been broken by the fall of the chest), the soldier fainted, as he realized the possibility of succour.

Leslie also heard the sound, but determined not to be baffled in his designs. Howling in his rage he pulled the chest away from Mallerton, and seeing that if he delayed he might yet be disappointed of his prey, he abandoned

the idea of seeking the razor, and bore his now senseless victim to the window.

The sergeant of the picquet with two or three men were already at the door. They shouted for admittance, but were only greeted by a wild peel of derisive laughter.

"Good God! I do believe that's Captain Leslie," cried the sergeant, and he threw himself desperately against the door, the spring-lock of which, however, did not yield.

Fortunately, in the passage one or two planks were lying, left there by some of the men in the employ of the engineers who had lately been engaged in repairs.

"Let's try this," said the non-commissioned officer, getting hold of one of them, and with the help of the men, using it as a battering-ram. After repeated blows the door gave way, and the rescuers rushed into the room.

Their eyes fell upon an awful spectacle.

There, crouching in the window (which was large and some four feet from the floor of the room), with one foot upon the sill, the other on the ledge outside,—his eyes now indeed blazing with a terrible light,—was Leslie. He was bending down and endeavouring to lift by its leather belt, Mallerton's senseless body, which was lying across the window ledge in a perilous

position, the feet and legs hanging outside, while the head and shoulders were still in the room. The sash, however, of the open window was a momentary check; for Leslie, in order to obtain sufficient force and purchase, was obliged to get his head outside it.

But *now* he is swinging the body in the air, he is in the very act of hurling the soldier to the ground!

The sergeant had by this time reached the window. A second more and he had been too late! Horror-stricken, he leapt at the body as it swung forward. He caught it by the shoulders, its impetus dragging him after it and dashing him against the wall; but he never loosed his hold.

For a moment the picture presented is horrible,—the madman on the ledge tearing fiendishly at Mallerton's belt,—the sergeant below clinging to his shoulders.

Then, the belt parts—a pause—a tottering —a wild effort to recover balance — hands stretched out in vain to save—a piercing, awful shriek—and the 'Black Devil' is lost to view.

One more unearthly shriek—despairing—terrible, as he traverses the sixty feet of space, —a dull thud upon the flags . . . and all is still.

. . . . . .

Thus was the mystery of the 'Black Devil'

solved, the tragic termination of which can never be forgotten in the —shire Regiment.

All ranks mourned deeply the Adjutant's loss and his terrible death, but that he had been mad for many weeks past there was no doubt. He had had a severe mental strain in working for the Staff College examination, and this, combined with the physical tax he had put on his constitution through his constant training for athletics, had at last brought out the family taint. That his madness had not hitherto been discovered was due to his extraordinary self-control and his knowledge of his weakness, many like instances of which are known to modern medical science.

Private Mallerton eventually recovered from the effects of his struggle and the terrors of that night; and all agreed that had it not been for his pluck and determination, other and worse fatalities might have occurred.

The officers rewarded him handsomely, and he was publicly thanked on parade by his Commanding Officer, who, in eulogistic terms, dwelt on his conduct as a brilliant example of a British soldier's courage.

HOW HE WAS BURIED.

HOW HE WAS BURIED.

"WELL, thank God! Tom, to see you back again; that's all as I can say," said the mother, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, and proceeding to give her son a good hug, and a sounding smack of a kiss,

"Thank God, my boy!"

Corporal Jones, the recipient of the embrace, accepted it rather sheepishly at first in the presence of so many onlookers; but finally, overcome with filial affection, returned the kiss with interest, and straightway proceeded to himself embrace all the remaining members of the fair sex present. These consisted of an aunt and a couple of sisters, and last, but not least, one whom we may call 'the girl he had left behind him'; and who, (though, no doubt, womanlike, she had consoled herself to some extent in his absence with one or two other admirers) was more overjoyed than any of the others at his return, and at the prospect of their speedy union.

The family and a few intimate friends— the young woman above mentioned, and two or three men, old 'pals' of Corporal Jones before he had joined the army—had assembled to greet him that evening on his return from 'foreign parts.'

His service with the colours had now expired, and his father, a small but tolerably well-to-do farmer in ——shire, had bidden them all to a feast in his son Tom's honour. The supper had been cleared away, and they had all drawn round the fire; the men had lighted their pipes, and made themselves comfortable, while the farmer had brought out a bottle of his whisky, of which he was very proud, and which was only produced on exceptional occasions.

"Fill up, boys, and you girls, too," he said, "for you must all drink Tom's health. God bless him!"

Then there was much handshaking all round, and Corporal Jones felt that he really *was* a hero. He was a bright, nice-looking, open-faced young fellow. Young, for alas! men go to the Reserve now when they are still very young, and just when their frame and mind are developing and they are becoming good and useful soldiers.

He had greatly benefited by his voyage home

from Egypt, and had lost nearly all traces of heat and climate, and of the dreadful sickness he had passed through a few years previously, and taken all round was a decidedly 'smart chap.' Being an only son, when 'Tom' had 'gone for a soldier,' there had been grief and consternation in his family, since his circumstances did not necessitate such an act, and there was plenty for him to do at home. But he was impelled by the love of possible adventure, and naturally had a desire to see something of the world; so his father wisely determined to let him take his own way, and did not attempt to disturb him or 'buy him out.'

"You must follow your own path," he wrote, somewhat hardly to his son, "as home is not good enough for you, you can't expect help from me. If you do well, all the better, and you'll get a warm welcome back again: if you do ill, it's your own look out. I shan't trouble after you."

Poor old Jones and his wife, with the unfortunate prejudices of their class and education, were—although they believed in their son's good sense—greatly afraid that 'going for a soldier' meant 'going to the devil,' than which—if a young fellow has his wits about him—a greater mistake could not be made. For

who would say that Corporal Jones' seven years' soldiering had not done him a world of good? It had developed his frame, sharpened his intellect, enlarged his sympathies, and given him some knowledge of the world and men, so that on his return he was all the more able to appreciate the comforts of his home, and to apply practically the experience he had gained.

At any rate his family were now all agreed that he had done well in becoming a soldier, and since they had heard nothing but good reports of him, and he had been promoted to full corporal, and at the time of leaving was next 'for' sergeant, they were naturally not a little proud of him.

The handshaking and health-drinking over, the old man remarked with a sort of chuckle,—

"Well, Kitty, you're the only girl as I know on as will *marry a dead man*."

"But he is alive now," replied Kitty to the foregoing strange remark, looking up shyly into her sweetheart's face, while her hand quietly found its way into his.

"Oh, Tom! how me and mother did cry when we got that letter from the captain," said one of the girls.

"Yes, and how astonished we were when we got yours after sayin' how you was gettin' well

again, and a tellin' us not to worry," said the other. "I shall never forget poor Kitty here when we told her, she wouldn't believe it,—nor would mother."

"I couldn't," said his mother, whose eyes dimmed at these recollections, "and if I hadn't a known it was your writin', and didn't see you now before me, I don't think as how I ever should a' done so."

"Well, tell us all about it, Tom," said Jack Hollins, a great friend of Corporal Jones. He was the son of the village blacksmith and a hefty powerful fellow, and had been within an ace of enlisting with Tom, only his mother got wind of the scheme and prevented him. "I never rightly understood the story."

"Yes, Tom," joined in his father, "let's have the whole thing from the time as you went away."

"Oh, yes do, Tom; do, there's a dear," said Kitty, to which remark the corporal responded with an affectionate squeeze. Tom indeed had now become quite regardless of appearances, so with his arm round his young woman's waist, and after a fond embrace, he said,—

"Well, I'll fill up my pipe again first and then I'll let you have it all; but it ain't much to tell."

"Oh, yes it is," was the general chorus; so the pipe having been duly filled, Corporal Jones related the following story in colloquial and graphic language, which the writer cannot hope to imitate. His readers must therefore be content with such an attempt at a reproduction of Corporal Jones' words as come within the range of his capabilities.

"Well, mother and father, and all of you—not forgetting Kitty," he began, looking down into Kitty's eyes and tightening considerably the pressure of his arm around her slender waist, "you'll remember that day as I said 'good-bye' to you all here at the end of that short furlough they gave me afore we went out with the draft to join the 1st Battalion. Well, when I left you I felt a big lump in my throat and a sort of a risin' in my stomach, as I thought it was ten chances to one if I ever seed you again, or if Kitty here and I should ever be 'spliced.' But I lit a pipe and had a smoke, and when I got to Wellington, who should I see but old Harry Watkins, also returnin' off furlough, who I knew was going out with the draft too. So he got into my carriage, and we found our way back to Ireland—to the Curragh—where the second Battalion was stationed, all right, reachin' there the next mornin', though poor old Harry was

more dead than alive. We had a very bad crossing over the Channel, and Harry kept a tellin' me as how his innards was bein' turned inside out, and all he could say was, 'I'm blowed if one of them there Arab's spears, as they say as we may get stuck inside of us when we gets to Egypt can be worse than what's a workin' about inside me now.' But, Lord bless you! I was all right, and he got over it, though he couldn't eat nothin' next day, and how he did swear when they put him on coal fatigue that afternoon! Poor old Harry! He's dead now. But he didn't get an Arab spear inside him; though he did get the fever, and was about the first to try the graveyard at Suakim. When I heard he was done for, I remembered how sea sick he had been that time and afterwards on the voyage out, and thinks I to myself,—

"'Ah, he never had no innards!'

"Well, two days after we got back to the Curragh the draft started—you remember it was the beginnin' of October, 1885—and most of us had only got just a year's service. We was full of spirits—some of us in more ways than one—when we marched away. There was rather over a hundred of us altogether under Captain ——. The band played us to the station, and my word! how the chaps who was left behind did turn out

and cheer us, and the whole camp too. They knew better than we did, I bet, that many of us would never come back. Howsomever we didn't think much of that then or of leavin' them all behind. We knew there was another big draft to follow in a month or two, and that we should see a lot of our old 'pals' again, though we didn't exactly know where we was agoin' to or what we was agoin' to do. We only knowed we was bound for Egypt and that the head-quarters of the 1st Battalion was garrisoning Suakim, where the fightin' took place earlier in the year. We had heard this here Suakim was a terrible unhealthy spot, but we knowed that some of the Regiment had been sent away to Cyprus for change of air, so bets was flyin' freely as to whether we should go to Suakim or Cyprus. Most of us was for Suakim, as we thought there was a chance of a bit of a 'turn up' with the Arab jokers there. Anyhow we was all in good 'eart, and we got to Queenstown that afternoon and embarked at once on the transport *Deccan*. There we found already aboard a lot of the 1st Battalion who had been invalided 'ome from Suakim in July, and who having got pretty right, were ordered out again from the depôt. I can tell you our 'earts fell when they told us about Suakim, what an orful

place it was, and how the men had been, and still was, dyin' like flies there. My word, how those chaps did swear at having to go back again!

"Well, we was all told off to different messes, and settled down aboard ship, but life on a transport or a troopship either, I can tell you, ain't all 'oney. We had no room to spare, and I must say as how I think Government crowds its soldiers shameful on them ships. Still, it had to be put up with, tho' we was right glad when we reached Port Said, for we had a terrible rough passage all the way there, and the stench down below at times was downright 'orrible. At Port Said we entered the Suez Canal, and there learnt for the first time that we was to go on to Suakim straight, at which the old 'uns from the 1st Battalion weren't best pleased, nor some of the young 'uns either. So we went down the Canal, and a wonderful place it is, and right glad we was to come up and lie about on deck, as the sun was very pleasant at that time of year. We got to Suez in two days, and after waiting a few hours started again for Suakim. This was only a four days' voyage, but we soon began to feel the heat. It was nigh the end of October, but it got 'otter and 'otter as we went down the Red Sea. They told us though that it weren't nothin' like as 'ot

as it was in the summer time, and of course the nights was cool, so as the most of us slept up on deck we could get a good night's rest.

"Well, on the fourth day from Suez we sighted Suakim. All this time we had been steamin' quietly close to the coast, and dreary lookin' enough it was,—nothin' but great rocky ranges of mountains and hills and stretches of desert, but all this was nothin' to Suakim as we got nearer to it. Afore us we could see a long sort of a channel runnin' down into a big 'arbour, at the bottom of which was a place covered with sort of low 'uts, (called Quarantine Island), and beyond again a lot of flat-roofed white 'ouses. The whole place was covered with a sort of steamin' mist, and we felt as if we couldn't breathe freely. I think there was a good many of us as we entered that 'arbour wished ourselves back again in Ireland. I know I did for one, and I ain't ashamed to say it. As we entered the 'arbour, we saw on our left a big camp of tents covered with a kind of matting shelters. This they told us was Graham's Point. At the nearest end was the 'ospital, as one of the old chaps who was coming out again told me.

"'You'll know about that afore long,' he said, 'and a good many of you 'll go in there and won't come out again, leastways except to go in *there*,' and he pointed to the burial ground which was

some way away on the opposite side of the channel.

"His words gave me a nasty turn, but I swore to myself I wouldn't go in that burial ground if I could help it, and here I am, you see."

"Yes, thank God!" said Tom's mother piously, while he paused to refill his pipe, and to look for a moment into Kitty's eyes, "I never thought to see you back."

"Well," continued Tom, "after a little space between them and the 'ospital there was another lot of tents, covered with matting, and them they told us was the 'eadquarters of the 1st Battalion, where we was to be quartered. Running down from the shore into deep water was a long pier, and all along this men was sittin' fishin'. As we steamed down past the pier and close to it, these chaps ran up to the end of it, while a whole lot more turned out of the tents to join 'em, and gave us a cheer as we passed. Some of 'em recognized their old chums comin' back again, and shouts of 'What Jack, is that you, lad?' and the like was heard all round.

"But what a lot they looked in their old kharkee! You had only to look at 'em to see what scores of 'em had gone through. Many of them looked terrible pale and wasted, poor chaps. The weather was cooler now though for Suakim, so most of 'em who had got

through the summer months so far, kept pretty fit till the Regiment left the following May. In course we cheered 'em back again, and the *Deccan* steamed on till we anchored some way lower down in the 'arbour. Then the Colonel and the Adjutant soon came aboard, and had a cheery word to say to all of us.

"The Colonel, ah! he was a good feller if you like. We all loved him, and how sorry we was when he left us three years after. There wasn't a chap in the Battalion that wouldn't a' died for him. Why, do you know that in the summer at Suakim the doctors said he was dyin'?—dyin' of dysentery, and that he must go away to Cyprus or somewhere to save his life; but he wouldn't go. He said he wasn't goin' to leave his men,—and he wasn't goin' to die. For days he 'told off' his prisoners, and did his work in his bed; and after a long time he pulled through,—and laughed at them all in the end.

"Well, I've been tellin' you all a long story, but there ain't so much more to tell now, so if you'll give us a drop of that whisky, father, I'll finish it up as quick as I can."

"Here you are, my boy," said his father, "mix it as you like;" so Corporal Jones having mixed a stiffish glass of grog, went on:

"Well, we disembarked that afternoon, goin' ashore in lighters, and were all told off to differ-

ent companies. The chaps in the 1st Battalion were right glad to see us, and did all they could for us, but that weren't much, poor devils! I could see them a lookin' at us, and that they didn't think much of us as a lot; for all the draft was very young, and not at all seasoned. One of 'em said to me,—

"'You chaps won't last long out here!'

"I told him to keep his tongue to hisself.

"'Time enough for it when it comes,' I said.

"They told us they had had no fightin' since July, and that Osman Digna seemed afraid to come on again. They had only had one or two alarms of night attacks. They said there was mostly nothin' to do but to lie and sweat, or fish, (there was plenty of good fishin'), or drink their dulness away, when they could get the liquor, which wasn't easy. All the better, as that leads to more sickness in them climates than anything else.

"Now when we arrived at Suakim we hadn't a case of sickness in the whole draft, and as the Battalion there had been so much 'ealthier the last few months, we thought we should escape; but within four days some of the chaps began to fall ill, and within a month nearly the whole draft was in hospital, and many of 'em had taken their last outin' to the graveyard on the opposite side.

"Of course I had seen my Colour Sergeant and the Captain of my company, but as there was a good many come to the company, they scarce got time to know us all, and the fifth day after landing, me and my chum—poor old Bob Locking—was took ill and went to 'ospital. Our uniform was taken back to the company stores, and as Locking and I went off together, we was put in the next bed to one another. Our names and numbers was marked up on the 'diet sheets,' which was 'ung up on the wall behind our beds; and after the doctor had seen us, the name of the illness we was sufferin' from was written down too.

"I saw mine; and so did Bob, 'Enteric Fever' was marked up,—but we weren't so bad at first but that we could talk to one another a bit.

"'We're in for it this journey,' said Bob to me, 'I don't suppose we'll either of us get out of this place, except to go across t'other side'—to the graveyard he meant.

"'I ain't goin' to kick the bucket if I can 'elp it,' says I, 'never say die, Bob!' but, poor Bob! he seemed to think as how there was no 'ope for him.

"Well, we laid there next one another day after day, night after night; and it was a neck-and-neck thing atween us. Each of us was as bad as t'other, and we were given the same grub and the same treatment. It was then I learnt

to love the Colonel. He used to come and see us, and say a few words to all of us in the ward; and though we couldn't talk much, it did please us to see him.

"After some days I seemed to lose count of everything about me, and not to care much about anything. I only thought to myself, 'I don't mean to die,' though I never felt afraid; it never struck me as I was near dyin', but I had a precious narrow squeak for it, they told me after. Then I only know that one day poor Bob, who was 'orful bad, raised himself a little in his bed, and said,—

"'Good-bye, Tom, I shan't see you no more.'

"I tried to answer him, but couldn't; and I shall see his wasted face to my dyin' day.

"After that I remember nothin', till one morning I seemed to wake up, and found one of the 'ospital orderlies bendin' over me. He was a new one (I found out afterwards that the feller as had been lookin' after Bob and me had caught the fever himself, poor chap). I felt 'orful ill and weak, but the fever had left me, and I asked the orderly 'what was up?' He said,—

"'You're safe, now, if you keep quiet.'

"I turned round and went to sleep again, and never thought about poor Bob.

"Some time later I wakes up again, and thinks of Bob, and looks at his bed, and

then I saw he wasn't there, and this troubled me very much, so when the orderly came again I asked him where Bob had gone to. He said,—

"'The man as was in the bed next to you died immediately after I began looking after you;' and then I was that weak I began cryin' like a child, and I remembered how poor Bob had said 'good-bye!'

"I never asked any more about it though, as the orderly, being a new one, didn't seem to know much. So time went on, and I soon began to get better; but they was uncommon careful of me for a long time, and wouldn't let me have nothin' but 'slops' to swaller, though at times I was terrible hungry. As I got stronger I moved about a bit, and sat outside, and of course I got friends with the orderlies, but they never called me by my surname. We was all 'Tom,' 'Dick,' and 'Harry,' or some nickname to one another.

"All this time I never thought of lookin' at my diet sheet as was hangin' behind my bed, though it was taken down regular every mornin', and my temperature, and what food I was to have marked up on it. The Colonel and the Captain came round now and then, but the Captain, of course, had only seen me with a lot of others, when I first came out, before I went to 'ospital,

and hadn't learnt my name. When he came round the ward, he only knew there was some of his company there, and used to talk to us all alike. This way he got to know me quite well; and it never struck me as he didn't know my name, and he never asked me.

"Well, I got quite well at last, and was sent out of 'ospital; and as I was getting better I wrote one or two letters, tellin' you all about it, which you got all right, didn't you, mother?"

"Oh, them was blessed letters," said his mother, "but I couldn't believe 'em!"

"Well, you see they was true, but I can fancy they surprised you."

Then Corporal Jones continued,—

"A 'ospital orderly was sent with me with a slip of paper back to the regiment, and to my company, and after a time we finds the Orderly Sergeant, and the 'ospital orderly gives him the slip of paper.

"'What's your name?' says the Sergeant.

"'No. 1903 Jones,' says I.

"'No it ain't,' says the orderly, 'No. 1895, Locking. Here it is on this bit of paper.'

"I turned round to him, and I was that angry I said,—

"'You lie! my name's Jones; poor Bob Locking died in hospital more than three weeks ago.'

"'Jones did, you mean,' he answered. 'We've always treated you as Locking, and spoken of you as Locking, and you've never said you wasn't Locking.'

"Well, we nearly come to blows about it, and would have had it out there and then, hadn't it a' been for the Sergeant, who said,—

"'Here stop this, you must come and see the Colour Sergeant.'

"On the way the Sergeant says,—

"'I see you young fellows when you come, and I remember Jones and Locking, and I believe you're Locking. What d'yer want to play off as Jones for?'

"Well,it wasn't no good my arguin' with him, so when I comes to the Colour Sergeant, I says,—

"'My name's Jones, No. 1903, and I want my clothes, please, as was taken from 'ospital back to store.'

"The Sergeant and the orderly was goin' to say something, but the Colour Sergeant jumps up, looks me in the face, and says,—

"'Now, young man, none of them games here! Jones was buried three weeks ago, and the whole company was at his funeral.'

"'That ain't true, Colour Sergeant,' I says, 'I'm Jones, and I wants my clothes and other things.'

"'None of your chat with me, my boy,' says the Colour Sergeant. 'You won't get Jones' things, his clothes has all been served out to another man, and his other traps and "necessaries"[1] sold by auction.'

"'His name's Locking,' broke in the hospital orderly.

"'You lie again,' I said,—and 'went for' him. The Sergeant pulled me off, though, afore I could hurt him, and the Colour Sergeant said to him,—

"'Sergeant Williams, fall in an escort and make Private Locking a prisoner! Crime him with creatin' a disturbance!

"I felt 'orful wild about it, and didn't know whether I was on my 'ead or my 'eels, but while the escort was fallin' in, the Colour Sergeant said to me,—

"'It's no use your trying this sort of game on 'ere. I suppose you want to play yourself off as Jones and get somethin' out of his relations, but I can tell you that the Captain have wrote to 'em to tell 'em as how he is dead and buried in that there graveyard; where later on you can go and see his name on a wooden cross, erected by his sorrowin' comrades.'

[1] "Necessaries," i.e., clothes, socks, razors, comb, knife, spoon, etc., which are a soldier's private property.

"This fairly knocked me over to think as 'ow you'd all 'eard as I was dead, and I could only say as it wasn't true, and keep on swearin' as I was Jones.

"'Well,' said the Colour Sergeant, 'we'll settle that all in the mornin' before the Colonel, when you're "told off." March off Private Locking to the guard-tent, Sergeant Williams!' and off I went.

"Now I must just say that Locking and I was very much alike; we were both fair and round-faced, with no hair on our faces, and bein' always great chums we had come to get nicknamed 'The Brothers' while we was in the 2nd Battalion. Bob though was not quite so big a man as me, but when I came out of the hospital I was much shrunk from the fever, and my face had got very thin, so that it wasn't easy, even for a chap as had knowed us both well, to say whether I was Locking or Jones. Still I knowed as there was several men who had come out with us who knowed us both, and I thought as how I could for certain get one of 'em to say which was which.

"Next mornin' I was first brought before the Captain of my company. He looked into the matter and said it was a very rum case. It struck me the Colour Serjeant began to think as

he might 'ave been rather 'asty the day before, and so he accordingly swore as how he remembered Locking and Jones quite well, as he had seen them both often 'afore they went to 'ospital (which of course he had, though we had been only four days with the company), and that he was sart'in sure I was Locking.

"Well, the Captain said he remembered seein' me in hospital, but didn't know my name; and anyhow I oughtn't to have created a disturbance,—so I must go before the Colonel. So up I goes to the Orderly Room—that's the place as the Commanding Orficer sees the prisoners in—and then there was a deuce of a row, I explained it all to the Colonel, who listened to everything, and I told him how it was that I 'went for' the orderly.

"'Well,' he said, 'if you really are Jones and not Locking, I will look over the disturbance, though you must learn to keep your temper in this regiment; but you must prove that you *are* Jones.'

"So I named several men who had come out in the draft with me, and asked for them as witnesses; but those who knew me best was either dead or sick in 'ospital theirselves and couldn't appear, and I'm blowed if one of the others would swear to me. They all said I was

so much changed by sickness, that they could not tell for certain whether I was Jones or Locking. One chap, though, said he could swear to my voice; but that weren't supposed to be good enough.

"Then the Colonel sent for my diet sheet from the hospital, and there sure enough was 'No. 1895, Pte. R. Locking,' written atop of it. The Colonel asked me why I had never spoken about this in 'ospital, if it was wrong, and I said I had never seen it. Then I said,—

"'Well, sir, there's one man as can swear to me, I know, and that's the 'ospital orderly as attended to me at first.'"

"'Where is he?' asked the Colonel.

"I said I knew he was sick of enteric fever; they sent over about him, and found out he was just 'anging between life and death. So the Colonel says to me,—

"'I shall remand you, Pte. Locking—as in the absence of further evidence, I must call you—until it can be seen whether this 'ospital orderly recovers and identifies you as Jones or not. If he dies, you will have to be called Locking, whether you like it or not, unless you can prove that you are not he, some other way. But if the 'ospital orderly gets well, and can swear to your being Jones, I will accept

SISTER NITA.

SISTER NITA.

CHAPTER I.

"HERE! You! Sergeant Warren!" said the Squadron Sergeant-Major roughly, addressing Sergeant Warren as he was on his way to his 'bunk'[1] from the parade-ground, after the dismissal of his guard. "You're wanted! Get ready at once, and fall in for escort duty at eleven-thirty; you'll be the Sergeant in charge of the escort."

Sergeant Warren's face flushed. He had been on barrack guard all the previous day and night, a service which entitled him to freedom from any fresh duty for several hours, except under the most exceptional circumstances.

"Escort duty, Sergeant-Major?" he replied with some warmth, and in tones of surprise, "Why, I've only just come off guard!"

[1] The separate small rooms occupied by Sergeants in Barracks are termed "Sergeants' bunks."

"I know that as well as you," was the answer. "But the squadron has to provide a sergeant and some men as escort to some foreign prince who's coming down from Dublin to have a look at these barracks and the Lines at the Curragh. You've been selected because you're the only N.C.O. available, and—because you're so smart," he added, his last words betraying an unmistakable sneer. As he spoke he turned to go.

"The only N.C.O.!" exclaimed Warren, following him. "What are Sergeants Johnson and Freeman doing? One of them should be 'for it.'"

"I tell you they aren't available. But don't stand questioning me here! Do what you're told at once, or I'll make you a prisoner for disobedience of orders."

"I wish to see the Adjutant, or Lieutenant Wroughton" (the officer in temporary command of his squadron), answered Warren, quietly enough, though it was evident from the look on his face and the expression in his eyes, that it was with difficulty that he restrained his anger.

"Do what you're told, I say," repeated the Sergeant-Major, raising his voice, and, paying no attention to Warren's request, putting on his most bullying manner. "If you don't obey

me at once, I'll put you in arrest, by G——!"

The man's manner and last words were too much for Sergeant Warren, who, overcome with rage, now forgot himself completely in the excitement of the moment. He felt certain that the imposition of this sudden duty was merely a means of gratifying the Sergeant-Major's private spite, for he had seen Sergeant Freeman but a quarter of an hour before, and that individual had told him that he had just heard an escort would be required, and that as he was not on any other duty he expected to be warned for it. He, therefore, suspected shrewdly that if Sergeant Freeman was not now available, the Sergeant-Major had devised some trivial duty on which to employ him in order to have the way clear for his own scheme of revenge, the reasons for which Warren knew only too well.

To detail him for the tedious duty of Sergeant to the escort after a wearying 'guard' was the climax to many similar—though not equally glaring — instances of injustice. His long smouldering resentment was now kindled into flame, and boiling with indignation he forgot the old military maxim—"Obey first and complain afterwards,"—forgot his duty and ruined his prospects.

Taking a step towards the Sergeant-Major, who shrank before his powerful figure, he shook his fist in his face and said,—

"I refuse to obey your orders. You've contrived this on purpose to be revenged on me. I've a good mind to give you a good thrashing. I despise your dirty tricks, you damned scoundrel."

He turned on his heel and left the astonished Sergeant-Major trembling with fear and fury. As he saw the frightened expression on the latter's face, Sergeant Warren experienced indeed a momentary satisfaction, but he rapidly had reason to regret bitterly his folly and hasty words, for within five minutes he was in close arrest, and ere the week was out he had been tried by Court-Martial and had been sentenced to reduction to the ranks.

Thus did Sergeant Richard Warren, one of the smartest non-commissioned officers of that distinguished regiment, the —— Dragoon Guards, stationed at Newbridge Barracks, co. Kildare, Ireland, resume, after some six years' service, the status of 'Trooper,' with which he had originally commenced his military career.

. . . . . .

Some two days after Warren's sentence had been carried into effect, the Curragh Camp was

alive with movement and preparations for manœuvres on a more than usually large scale. It was the last field-day of the drill season, and as the foreign Royal personage already alluded to—himself a distinguished soldier—had been invited to witness the proceedings, the Commander-in-Chief of the troops in Ireland had impressed upon the generals and commanding officers under him the necessity of a particularly smart turn out and intelligent interpretation of their orders. He was anxious to show that if the British army was greatly inferior in numbers to that of the visitor's own country, it was second to none in physique and appearance, or (whatever might be said to the contrary) in its ability to manœuvre with rapidity and due appreciation of the military requirements of the moment.

It was a glorious and heart-stirring sight that September morning. For the purposes of the drill season numerous additional regiments had been brought from other parts of Ireland and temporarily encamped on the Curragh (whose springy turf presented to the eyes one vast expanse of vivid green), and now on all sides different bodies of troops were on their way to take up their positions before the commencement of the day's operations. Away on the

right the gallant 'Scots Greys' might be seen wending their way from Donelly's Hollow over the brow of the opposite rising ground, their arms glittering in the sunlight, and their matchless chargers showing up clearly in the distance, until they were lost to view amid the trees already brilliant with the tints of early autumn. This famous regiment was closely followed by a battery of Horse Artillery, while next over the grass, pursuing the same direction, came two line regiments marching in column, the stirring music of whose bands was wafted back to the Camp on the wings of the fitful breeze.

Directly beneath the ridge on which the Camp is situated was to be seen a regiment of Hussars moving at a trot towards Kildare, their rapid movements lending an ever varying change to the scene, while at the further side of the Curragh there suddenly emerged a squadron of Dragoons from Newbridge. Through the lines of huts pour regiment after regiment, now a battalion of the Rifles, now the 'Royal Irish,' now the Guards from Dublin, and many others, marching off in different directions to the lively strains of their regimental bands. All was bustle and movement, brilliancy and colour, the lovely weather adding largely to the general glamour. Such sights were familiar

enough to the on-lookers, but to-day, the occasion, and remarkable beauty of the whole scene inspired them with a feeling of something akin to enthusiasm. This reaches its climax when suddenly is heard a wild melody, and through the lines of huts emerge the Pioneers of the Seaforth Highlanders, closely followed by the Pipers, headed by a truly magnificent Pipe-Major, whose tall figure, broad chest and mighty calves are alone worth a journey to see. Then come the band, and the remainder of the regiment, the men's waving bonnets and swaying kilts showing off to special advantage their unusually good physique. They are fine fellows these Scotchmen, and they know it, and their national dress loses nothing of its beauty on such wearers.

"The 'Jocks'[1] has it," cries an excited Irish jarvey (car-driver). "Them's the bhoys for ye!"

"Faith! an' it's only the Royal Oirish as bhates 'em at all!" rejoins another, patriotically.

The 'Seaforths' debouch on to the grass, the companies form column, and as they are gradually merged in the more distant landscape the spectator experiences the sense of having

[1] Men of Scotch regiments are generally known as "Jocks" in the army.

seen what is one of the most beautiful and inspiriting sights of the world—a fine Highland Regiment in full dress, proudly marching to the strains of its national music.

One is sorely tempted to linger over this rough sketch of the varied scene that day presented far and near to those who had the privilege of enjoying it. First the expanse of green, then the distant trees and fields, with here and there a glimpse of brilliant uniforms among them, then the military operations themselves, which, as the firing and fighting commenced, could not fail to be interesting and exciting—even to the uninitiated; the Horse Artillery galloping from point to point and delivering a well-directed fire; the scouting and brilliant charges of the cavalry; the gradual development of the general and final attack of the infantry; and in conclusion, on the 'Cease fire!' sounding, the brilliant spectacle of the march past and review of all the troops.

On such points as these indeed one could dwell with ease, but a more lengthy description might prove wearisome to the reader; and Trooper Richard Warren and others intimately connected with this story, on whose lives an event of that field-day on the Curragh exerted a serious influence, claim attention.

Trooper Warren had deeply felt his reduction to the ranks ; and though he could scarcely have expected any other treatment, and had, in fact, on account of his previous good character, and the kindliness of the President of the Court-Martial (a Major in his Regiment, Lawrence by name), been leniently dealt with, (considering his position and the nature of his offence), his spirit smarted under a sense of injustice. By his punishment all his hopes, aims, and ambitions—and they were not otherwise than numerous and lofty—had been destroyed at one fell blow. There were circumstances in his previous career, chiefly before he entered the army, which predisposed his mind to think badly of those who were in a superior walk of life to himself—to give them as a class no credit for the consideration of the feelings or needs of those beneath them, and his experience of Army life had unfortunately somewhat fostered this warping of his mind. He had in his time seen and noted many instances of harshness and injustice to soldiers, mainly through the influence and schemes of non-commissioned officers ; which, however, would not have been suffered to be imposed, had—so he considered—*officers* have made proper inquiries. Foolishly he got into the habit of overlooking the frequent occasions

when such things did *not* occur, and forgot how difficult it often is for an officer, from numerous causes,—whether from the way a matter is put before him, or possibly from inexperience—to judge immediately of the rights or wrongs of a case. He therefore gradually became under the impression—a very wrong one—that it was the chief pleasure of those in authority to be 'down on' their subordinates; and unfortunately he was the more led to this conclusion, since the officer who had recently commanded his squadron, but who had now left the Regiment, had, as a rule, treated his men with unnecessary severity, in which behaviour he had been aided and abetted by our acquaintance, the Squadron Sergeant-Major.

Warren had, however, until his unfortunate Court-Martial, contrived with some difficulty to keep out of trouble; and, while setting before himself the constant endeavour to attain to the position of a Squadron Sergeant-Major, (a position almost won, for he was the next to be promoted), had determined that when he gained that rank—one of much authority—he would do his best to inaugurate a new *régime*, and to use his influence with his officers to prevent any such occurrences as those of which he complained.

This had been his ambition, in the nursing of which he had borne many insults, and endured many acts of injustice at the hands of his Squadron Sergeant-Major, who hated him. Now, by his own foolish conduct, his hopes were dashed, the idol he had set up was destroyed, he could never be promoted; and there arose within him a bitter feeling of resentment, a longing for revenge on those who were set over him, but more particularly on the officer who had prosecuted him at his Court-Martial.

Lieutenant Carston, the officer alluded to, had, it will be seen, by his action on that occasion confirmed the unfortunate views already held by Warren. He had not attempted to spare the latter, but, holding that the provocation received, or that the reasons for that provocation (with which he had become acquainted) could in no way justify his offence, he had pressed the case home, and, in his address to the Court, had urged that Warren should be made an example of and dealt with severely. This it was that the Sergeant felt so deeply, and this it was that—heaped upon all his previous misguided beliefs and convictions—opened the chamber of his heart to longings for revenge.

As for Lieutenant Carston, he had no notion

of behaving harshly or unjustly. At the time of the Court-Martial the Adjutant of the Regiment had been absent for a few days on leave, and Carston was performing his duties temporarily, one of which had been to prosecute Sergeant Warren. Carston was an excellent officer, with a strong idea of duty. He saw that the escort duty had been wrongfully imposed on Warren, and upon further inquiry in the matter he learnt that this was only one of many instances in which the Sergeant-Major had vented his spite upon his subordinate. He also learnt that the reason of this spite was that some weeks previously Sergeant Warren had discovered that the Sergeant-Major had been swindling many of the men of the squadron, whereby they had been mulcted of some of their pay which went into his own pocket. Warren had told the Sergeant-Major plainly in the presence of another non-commissioned officer that unless he rectified the matter and restored the men their money, he would report him. The Sergeant-Major, fearful of being shown up, had done Warren's bidding, and nothing further had been said at the time, but the slight and humiliation had never been forgiven, and he had determined to wreak his spiteful hatred upon his inferior, which he was able, in his position,

to do very effectually. All this Carston found out, (as Warren became aware of), before the Court-Martial assembled, but he, rightly, as a soldier, would not allow his ideas of discipline to be vitiated by his knowledge; and, though he also subsequently procured the punishment of the Sergeant-Major, he held that there were no circumstances which in the eyes of military law could justify such a flagrant refusal to obey orders as Warren's, or the use of such threatening language.

But in his heart Carston, who had always admired the ex-Sergeant both as a man and a horseman, (for there was much that was striking about his appearance, and he was a fine rider), had felt sorry for him and had really sympathized with him, and he was only waiting to tell him so and to do him 'a good turn,' until the affair had blown over, and till Warren had again settled down somewhat in his rank of 'trooper.'

CHAPTER II.

ON the morning of the field-day Sister Nita was sitting in the nurse's room of the Curragh Military Hospital. She had been up a great part of the night in charge of a patient who was suffering from typhoid fever, and whose life had been almost despaired of, and having also had much to do from an early hour, she felt tired. It was about 11.15 a.m., and everything was ready for the Doctor to make his rounds. Until he arrived, she was taking a few minutes' rest.

As she leans back in her chair reading a letter received that morning, which she had not previously had time to open, let us take a glimpse at her. She is still young, perhaps four-and-twenty, and the very type of beautiful womanhood. As she reads, a sweet smile lights up her oval face, disclosing her regular teeth, and for a moment she raises her eyes from the letter. They are large, earnest, clear gray eyes beneath well-marked brows, and fringed with

long dark lashes, and they seem well-nigh unfathomable in their wonderful depths of all that betoken intelligence and the appreciation of the woes and joys of others. The red cape upon her shoulders relieves the subdued colour of her hospital dress and shows off the brilliant transparency of her complexion, slightly tinged with a touch of rose, while her nurse's cap but half conceals the masses of her lovely hair, gathered up in simple coils, and varying from shades of brown to sunny gold. Her fine, delicate nose, somewhat large though expressive mouth, and rounded chin, complete the picture, and proclaim her what she is—a beautiful, tender, well-bred woman. As she reclines in her chair, one is filled with admiration, but not until she rises, at the sound of a knock at the door, would the full grace and dignity of her loveliness be realized. For about that tall and well-rounded figure is a something which constitutes more than half her charm, a consciousness of power and self-reliance, an air of loving sympathy, a capability which discloses itself in her every movement, her every glance.

"Sister, you're wanted," said the hospital orderly as he entered the room, in response to her "Come in."

"Has the Doctor come?" she asked.

"No, Sister, though 'e's been sent for at once. There's a bad case, a trooper of the —— Dragoon Guards injured at the field-day, and 'ere's a note for you, as come with him."

Sister Nita took the note from the orderly's hand. It was hurriedly written on a scrap of paper torn out of a note-book, and ran,—

"DEAREST NITA,—Try and get Trooper Warren as your patient. I know you will do your best for him, but I fear he is terribly hurt. He is a man in whom I take a particular interest, and has had hard luck lately. Save him if you can. I had a narrow shave too, but, thank God! am unhurt.

"Yours,

"FRANK."

Nita's face flushed and her hand trembled as she read the last words.

"Is the man who brought this still here?' she inquired.

"No, sister, 'e said there wasn't no answer required, and that 'e 'ad orders to rejoin his squadron at once."

"Did he say anything about the accident?"

"Only as the trooper's 'orse 'ad runned away with 'im and charged into the 'orse the orficer was a ridin', and they both rolled over as they

was crossin' the road down from the flagstaff, but the orficer was only a bit shook."

"What a merciful escape!" ejaculated the nurse. "Is the man much hurt?"

"Seems as though 'e is, Sister," was the reply. "Looks to me as if he were more dead than alive. 'E don't move nor nothin'. The Hospital Sergeant sent him up to your ward."

"That's right! I hope I shall be able to keep him as my patient," answered Nita, thinking of the note received from her brother,—Frank Carston.

They had left the nurse's room, and by this time their hurrying footsteps had brought them to the ward, outside which they met the doctor, a clever man and a great ally of Sister Nita's, who had come up a different staircase. He paused for a moment.

"Good morning, Sister," he said. "I hear there's a bad case. Sounds like concussion of the brain. The man's sent to your ward, isn't he?"

"Yes, doctor," replied Nita. "I hope I shall be able to nurse him?"

"Of course. I don't suppose he could be moved now. Besides, how could he possibly be in better hands?" he asked, with gallantry.

Nita smiled graciously in response, and

together they entered the ward, a small though airy room reserved for very bad cases only.

A couple of orderlies under the direction of a Hospital Sergeant were occupied at a bed near a window on the opposite side of the room, removing the clothing from a figure lying lifelessly upon it, and towards this group the doctor and the nurse hastily made their way.

"I'm afraid it's not much good, sir," said the Sergeant, addressing the Doctor.

"Oh! he's not dead, is he?" inquired Sister Nita, anxiously, and full of pity at the thought that perhaps already Death had laid his untimely hand upon the fine figure lying prostrate before her.

The Doctor made no reply, but proceeded to carefully examine the trooper's inanimate form.

"As I thought," he said at length. "Concussion! He may pull through, but I fear there is but little hope. It depends on two things, Sister Nita, the man's constitution and your nursing. The latter I am sure of, the former—well, time will show. Hard lines, isn't it, if he should go? Such a splendid young fellow. Now, follow my directions."

While Sister Nita was carefully noting the Doctor's instructions she was suddenly seized

with a strange and unaccountable inspiration.

For as she looked on the trooper's face, death-like in its pallid beauty, as she marked the broad brow and resolute mouth, as she was struck by the power and proportions of his tall athletic frame, it seemed to her that Warren's life and hers became connected in some unseen way, as if it was an absolute necessity to *her* that he should live, as if—though well-nigh dead—she, and she alone, had power to save him.

It was a strange notion, but Sister Nita was no hysterical creature led astray by a crack-brained fancy. Calm and gentle, she always tried to do her best for her patients, and, beloved by all, was considered the best nurse in the hospital; but the feeling that now flooded her soul was something more than a mere resolve to do her duty, and it centred itself in a desperate determination which she felt she could carry through to a successful issue, that, though circumstances were terribly against the trooper lying before her, he should not die, but—through *her*—should live.

She could give no explanation of this inspiration, for it was nothing less; indeed, she had not time to reason about it or question it, she only knew that it had come upon her unawares, and

that she realized that her own happiness was in some strange way connected with it.

That afternoon about five o'clock Warren still lay in the same death-like condition, and Sister Nita, as she sat by his bedside patiently waiting for the slightest sign of returning consciousness, was speculating with more than ordinary interest about her patient, his life, his thoughts, his feelings, his nature, and his character. She always tried to *know* all her patients, and it was her success in such endeavours, and her sympathy, that made her such a wonderfully good nurse, and did more for those she tended than any number of bottles of medicine. But with regard to Warren, in proportion as the determination to save his life took so strong a hold upon her, so also was she stirred by an unusual curiosity.

As the doctor had said, Warren was a splendid young fellow; but it was not so much his looks and build that attracted her—she had seen many a man as nobly proportioned, many a man as handsome—it was a certain undefinable expression about his face, a sensitiveness, and yet a force, that made her believe that he was a man of no ordinary character—no ordinary soldier. Perhaps, she thought, this was all fancy on her part, but she recollected her

brother's note, and that he had mentioned that he took a particular interest in the man, and begged her especially to look after him. Was there then something unusual about him, and how did it happen that he and her brother had mutually suffered in the same accident ?

In the midst of Sister Nita's musings, an orderly came and told her that Mr. Carston wanted to see her and to know about Trooper Warren.

She dared not leave her charge, so her brother was admitted to the ward, for Warren was in such a condition that Carston's presence there for a while could do no harm. She went to the door to meet him and he entered very quietly.

"How is the poor fellow, Nita ?" he asked in tones of the liveliest sympathy.

"He is still insensible," his sister answered ; "though we have done and are doing everything in our power to restore him to consciousness."

"It won't kill him, will it ?" again asked Carston. "That would be hard lines."

"Doctor Austin is afraid that in spite of all our efforts he may never regain his senses, or that if he does, he may collapse at once. But I am on the watch in case he shows any signs of

awakening, and know what to do. I shan't leave him, and mean to save his life if possible." She spoke earnestly and drew her brother to the bed where Trooper Warren lay.

"Look at him, Frank," she said.

As Carston's eyes fell upon the trooper he shuddered and started back. At the time of the accident he had not—in the confusion—remarked the ghastliness of the trooper's face, but of late he had, one way and another, seen a good deal of Warren, and now the change shocked him.

"He's dead, Nita!" he said in a horrified whisper.

"No, not yet. There's still life in him, and while there's life, there's hope. But he has received a terrible blow. Oh! Frank," she continued, turning to her brother, her great gray eyes full of anxiety, and taking hold of his arm, "you've been here all this while, and I have never asked you about yourself. How are you, and how did it all happen? You look pale."

"Oh! don't trouble about me, dear Nita, I'm all right. I felt a bit shaken at first—we had such a collision. But I had quite enough to do seeing after getting this poor chap to hospital, and that pulled me together. I thought he was killed outright."

"Thank God it was no worse! But you must keep quiet for a few days, Frank," said his sister. "Now tell me about the collision. I thought it must be something of that kind!"

"Well, it happened in the most curious way," and as he spoke Nita drew him a little further away from the bedside, still, however, keeping her eyes on the patient. "My squadron was detached this morning from my regiment, and was taking part in the operations scouting for the defence. In the performance of this duty, when in charge of some of our scouts, I suddenly found myself within but a short distance of those of the attacking force, who happened to be also men from the remaining portion of my regiment. I wanted to find out their movements, and I suppose we ventured rather too near them, for they began to try and cut us off and make prisoners of us. We had, however, outdistanced them, and the two men with me were clear away, when my new charger, which is much out of condition, seemed utterly blown, and I could not get him along. I thought though that I was perfectly safe, but on looking round to make sure, I perceived that one of the enemy's scouts had stopped, but that the other was galloping furiously towards me. He was coming so fast that I saw his horse

must be running away. I tried to ride on, however, but my horse would scarcely move, and the next thing I was aware of just as I was crossing the road down from the flagstaff—you know the spot"—Nita nodded assent, "was a tremendous shock, which threw me out of my saddle on to the grass on the other side of the road. As I got up I saw a horse tearing madly away, and that Warren here was lying motionless on the road. He was senseless, as he is still, poor fellow."

"How terrible! but what a fortunate thing that you escaped. But of course he could not help it?"

"Of course not,—and yet he was such a good horseman. I know him well and have often admired his riding. They tell me, too, that though his horse does pull, it has never been known to get away with him before. It's an odd circumstance that I prosecuted him at a Court-Martial only a few days ago when he was a Sergeant, and am more or less responsible for his unfortunate reduction to the ranks, which I think he felt keenly. I was very sorry for him, as he was a smart non-commissioned officer and he had had rather rough luck."

"But you don't think, Frank," began Sister Nita slowly, and with a scarcely perceptible

shrinking from Warren's bedside, "you don't think that—from revenge—he—he—?"

"Oh! no—of course not—not *that*," broke in Carston hastily, "he is much too good a fellow to do such a thing as that. It was a strange coincidence, that's all."

"It was indeed!" said Nita, with an air of relief. "But I am so thankful you are unhurt, dear Frank. And now," she continued, "I think you had better go. The doctor will be here again presently, and I have to administer restoratives."

"Very well, if you wish it, I'll be off. But—" and now it was her brother's turn to look anxious, "do take care of yourself, and don't overdo it again. You are beginning to look pale and worn. Remember, all the troopers' lives in the world aren't worth the sacrifice of your health. Oh! Nita," he added, spontaneously, "I do wish you'd give up this mad craze of yours!"

But Sister Nita only smiled sweetly, shook her head, and waved her hand imperiously towards the door, so with a shrug of the shoulders and an air of resignation Frank Carston left her.

Carston, like everyone else, was Nita's slave. Born of wealthy parents, these two had been

left orphans after their mother's death, which occurred when Nita was sixteen years of age. She was a year and a half older than Frank, and though deeply attached to him had always taken the lead in everything from her childhood. Therefore, when she announced her intention of becoming a hospital nurse, no amount of persuasion on his part could turn her from her purpose. From her earliest days Nita had been swayed by a longing to do some good in the world, to which indeed her mother's influence had greatly contributed. The latter, a highly intellectual woman of wide sympathies, had impressed upon her daughter that the joys and woes of others, the penury and distress around us, are worth more than a passing glance, and that as she grew up she should endeavour to do all she could to lighten the lot of those less bountifully supplied with the good things of this world, and avoid passing her own life in selfish idleness and indifference. Nita, by nature predisposed to generous impulses, reflected deeply on her mother's words, and eventually determined, not merely to give to this or that charity (which when she came of age she could well afford to do), but with her own hands, to help, to live among, to work for, those who suffered.

To become a hospital nurse seemed to her the best way of carrying out her ideas, and accordingly, though she was by no means averse to the pleasures of this life, and the delights of her country home, she gave them up and entered a London hospital. There she soon became much valued and beloved, and there she found many an opportunity of extending her private charity in worthy directions; for many poor creatures left that hospital with substantial assistance from her, and able in consequence to pursue their daily avocations with the burden of their lives lightened.

After two years of this work, however, the strain told too much on Nita's health. The doctors said she must have rest and country air; indeed, that she ought to give up nursing altogether. To this latter course, however, she declined to agree, but after having taken a long holiday and recovered her strength to a considerable extent, she yielded to her brother's entreaties not to return to the London hospital, and attracted by his love of his profession and his interest in his men, applied to join the staff of Army hospital nurses. She was immediately accepted, and sent to the hospital at the Curragh, to which place she had asked to be appointed, as it is a healthy station, and because her brother

was quartered at the cavalry barracks at Newbridge, only about two miles distant.

This somewhat reconciled Carston, for he was delighted to have her so near him; but, nevertheless, he could not, although he fully recognized her noble motives and her eminent fitness for her work, honestly approve of her self-imposed duties, or see their necessity. He realized the dangers that surrounded her, and considered that she was not filling the station in life to which she had been born, and frequently offered to leave the service and go and live with her in their old country home. She knew, however, that this would mean a great sacrifice on his part, nor did the suggestion fall in with her somewhat exaggerated notions of her duties to her fellow-creatures, so she would have none of it. Frank then centred his hopes in the possibility of her falling in love with some eligible fellow-officer—there were only too many ready to fall in love with *her*—and with the object of bringing about such a desirable contingency he took every possible opportunity of presenting to her all the eligible young men he came across.

She, however, soon found out his plan, would have nothing to say to the would-be suitors, and one day taxed her brother with his intentions.

Of course, he professed his innocence, but she did not believe him, laughed at him, and called him a "silly boy," adding earnestly that she found that by nursing soldiers she was doing useful work, more interesting to her than anything else, that she was often able to be of real assistance to them, and that she meant to continue her present life as long as possible.

Frank could only give in, and call *her*— "hopeless."

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT three o'clock one afternoon, some four weeks after his accident, Sister Nita was sitting by Trooper Warren's bed. He had just awaked from sleep, and was lying quietly watching her. She was reading; for with the exception of Warren, who occupied most of her attention, but who was not allowed to talk much, she had no patients in that ward. The soldier looked terribly pale and drawn, but he was thought to be now out of danger. Sister Nita had saved him, and he knew it. He owed his life to her, the doctor had told him so. She had saved him by her ceaseless care and watching, by her readiness, resource, and devotion to her duty.

Warren had lain senseless and motionless for many hours after the events recorded in the previous chapter. Sister Nita wearily watched and watched, but he made no sign, and she feared lest his life might gradually ebb away while he was in this unconscious condition. She did not, however, despair, but became the more deter-

mined that he should live, and applied the remedies unceasingly. At last she was rewarded, for suddenly, in the early morning hours, there came a glimmer of returning life. Her heart leapt with triumph and joy, but she trembled in her suppressed excitement, for she knew that this was the most critical moment, and that now all her skill and presence of mind was required to save her patient from sinking, or from the loss of his reason. But Nita succeeded in her task, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him drop into a peaceful slumber. For several days there was cause for much anxiety, but her nursing and Warren's fine constitution won the battle, though without her assistance the latter would have been of little avail. Now he was lying in the hospital, sick and weak as a child indeed, but on the road to the recovery of his health and strength.

As he lay back that afternoon and gazed upon his nurse, wretched though he was by reason of a terrible weight upon his conscience, a flood of gratitude poured into his soul. What was he that this woman should have bestowed such unceasing care upon him? He owed his life to her! So they all said. Only *she* had never uttered a word, had never alluded to the imminent danger from which she had rescued him.

Perhaps though, he thought, it would have been better if he had died! And yet he clung to life. How could he repay her? He! a poor soldier, while she was a lady—the most beautiful, the most gentle creature he had ever seen. He!—a would-be . . . .

He uttered a stifled groan at the thought of *what* he was!

Sister Nita heard the sound, and putting down her book, inquired somewhat anxiously if anything was the matter?

"No, thank you, sister," was the reply.

"What made you groan, then?" she asked. "Aren't you comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you! It was my thoughts. Sister, I want to tell you something." The sick man spoke faintly, and she leant towards him.

"You mustn't talk much," she said, "it isn't good for you."

"I must tell you," he replied impulsively, "I have often wished, but I have never felt able to before. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, Sister, for having saved my life; but I don't know how to do so properly. I know I owe my life entirely to you."

"Nonsense!" answered Sister Nita, blushing at this outburst of gratitude. "I have done nothing more than nurse you as well as I can, I

have only done my duty; I couldn't do anything less, could I?" and she smiled.

"Oh, yes, you could! I know you could. The doctor and the orderly told me it's only through you that I'm alive now—that I was all but gone—and that had it not been for you, I hadn't a chance. I don't know how to show you how grateful I am, how to repay you." He paused for a moment, then went on strangely, "But if you had known me, you wouldn't have troubled so about me—you wouldn't have nursed me, and then I should have died. It would perhaps have been better—better—" and he turned his head weakly away from her.

"What nonsense you are talking, Warren! How could it have been better for you to die? You mustn't agitate yourself like this, or you will get ill again. It is very bad for you. This afternoon, too, just when I was going to allow you to see your first visitor. I'm afraid I shan't be able to let him in now." Sister Nita was surprised at and did not know what to make of Warren's words, but she attributed them merely to the state of his health, and the naturally still somewhat weak condition of his brain. Her speech, however, calmed him and distracted his thoughts.

"A visitor? Who wants to come and see

me?" he asked. "But please let him come, Sister. Who is it?"

"Somebody who takes a great interest in you, and has been several times to ask after you. But I shan't tell you now. You must rest yourself before he comes, and he'll only be able to stay a very short time. Now, you're not to talk any more."

Warren knew his nurse well enough by this time to understand that her commands must be obeyed, so he did not attempt to say another word. He continued, however, to puzzle his brain as to the identity of his expected visitor. So he lay for about half an hour, wondering, and quietly watching Sister Nita, who scarcely left his side, until an orderly came into the ward and said that she was wanted. In a few minutes she returned and told Warren that his visitor had arrived. Before he could again ask her who it was, he was aware of a tall, manly figure crossing the room, and an open, smiling face by his bedside.

"Well, Warren, I'm glad to see you. How are you getting on?" said a cheery voice, though its owner spoke in a low tone. "I'm afraid you've had a very bad time."

No answer!—for Warren was staring at the new-comer with a horrified expression on his

face, and though he moved his lips, no sound came from them.

The visitor looked blankly at Sister Nita. She had told him that the trooper was much better, and that his reason had in no way suffered; but the way in which his greeting had been received did not convey that impression.

"Didn't you tell him I was coming?" he asked, addressing Sister Nita.

"I said someone was coming to see him, but I didn't say who," replied Nita. "I thought it would be a pleasant surprise." She began to feel that the doctor had been injudicious in permitting this interview, and that it might result in harm to her patient. She looked on uneasily. Warren's visitor, however, seated himself on a chair at the bedside, while the sick man still stared at him in the same strange way, and continued, as if there was nothing unusual in his reception,—

"Well, at any rate, Warren, I'm uncommonly glad to be able to see you at last. I've been to inquire after you several times, but Sister Nita here would not let me have so much as a glimpse of you. That was a terribly narrow shave you had that day. I thought you were killed outright, but we did all we could for you

at once. I never remember seeing a horse run away so madly as yours did. I couldn't get out of your way. It was a pretty near thing for me, too, I can tell you; but, thank God! I escaped with a bit of a shaking." The speaker had gone on hurriedly thus far, as he felt that he must say something; though as he observed the strange expression on Warren's face, he very much doubted if he understood him. When he concluded, however, the soldier took his eyes off the speaker's face, and, covering his own with his hands, groaned feebly.

Here Sister Nita interposed. It seemed as if so vivid a reminder of his terrible accident was altogether too much for her patient. They had over-estimated his strength—his progress. How could they—she and the doctor—have acted with such folly? She must put a stop to this at once. She whispered hurriedly in the visitor's ear,—

"You mustn't stay any longer, you must go."

For once that individual resisted her authority. Perhaps he was wrong in doing so, though what harm could it do? He doubted whether the man could understand him, and yet he had something he felt he must say to him. He acted on his impulse. Leaning over the soldier, as he lay in bed with his hands still before his

face, he put his hand upon his shoulder, and said,—

"Warren, there was something I wanted to say to you, but I never got an opportunity before your accident, and I am not sure if you can quite understand me now, though I hope so. I wanted to tell you how very sorry I was for you about that wretched Court-Martial." The sick man removed his hands for a space, and the look in his eyes was indescribable—horror and astonishment were therein depicted. Then again he covered his face, as his visitor continued: "I know you thought me very hard on you that day—I am sure you did. But I wasn't. In the interests of the Regiment and Service I could have done nothing else; but I felt for you deeply, all the same. I knew you had been goaded on to what you said, and I believed you to be a very smart non-commissioned officer, but I could only do my duty. I want you to understand this, and how sorry I am about it."

At these words, beneath the sick man's hands came the sound of passionate sobs.

"God help me!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "God help me!"

"Come away! Come away! Frank," said Sister Nita, in the greatest anxiety, and clutching the visitor's arm. "Don't you see you are

agitating him terribly? You *must* come away, or you'll bring on a relapse."

"I hope not," said Frank. "I thought he might like to know what I felt." Then he turned to Warren as he was leaving, and said, "Good-bye, Warren! They tell me I must go now, but I shall come and see you again soon, and I hope you will be much stronger then; and when you get back to the regiment we must do all we can for you." But the soldier—still lying back with his hands before his face, and with his shoulders heaving convulsively—seemed as if he did not hear his words.

As he reached the door, followed by Nita, whose face was the picture of anxiety, Frank turned again and looked in the direction of the sick man, in whose attitude there was no change. They left the room, and he said,—

"I believe the poor fellow is done for, Nita. I don't think my visit can have done him any harm. It was evident that he didn't know me at first, but that when I began to talk about the accident and the Court-Martial, my words recalled some indistinct memories of something dreadful which had happened to him. What hard luck it is! I'm afraid he'll never get his mind back again properly—never be good for anything."

"Do you think so, Frank?" was Nita's answer. She spoke hurriedly, and kept her hand on the door handle, for she felt she must not leave her charge. "I don't understand it at all. He has seemed perfectly clear in his senses, and was getting on splendidly. But you won't be able to come and see him again for a long time. You ought to have gone away when I told you. I'm very much afraid this will have a bad effect. There is no doubt that seeing you has upset him. But I must not leave him any longer. Good-bye!"

As Sister Nita returned to the soldier's cot, however, she remembered how when, earlier in the afternoon, Warren had thanked her for saving his life, he had said so strangely that perhaps it would have been better if he had died. Was Frank right after all? Was the soldier's intellect shaken? Had she only saved his body—not his mind?

She went up to him. He was still lying as they had left him.

"Warren," she said, almost tenderly. "What is the matter? Tell me!"

The soldier heard and removed his hands. The look of astonishment and horror had not yet faded from his face, but there was more than that now stamped upon it.

"Sister," he whispered hoarsely, and it was clear that his mind was not wandering. "Sister, do you know who that gentleman was? That was Lieutenant Carston."

"What a question to ask me, Warren!" she replied with a smile. "Why, of course I know him. He is my own brother!"

"Your brother! *Your* brother!" he repeated, in tones of the most intense agony, and he put his hands up feebly as if to keep her back from him. "Don't touch me! You will never forgive me! I thought he was dead, and that—*I had killed him.* I hated him and—tried—to—kill him. *Your* brother! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

CHAPTER IV.

THAT sister Nita had been much horrified and distressed at Warren's terrible confession can be well imagined, for although when he had first been brought to hospital and Frank Carston had related the story of the accident, some notion of the truth had vaguely crossed her mind, this had been quite dispelled by the latter's disclaimer. Warren's patience, his quiet, refined manner, the grateful way in which he had accepted her administrations, had completely disarmed her, and she could never have thought him capable of committing an act so wicked as that of which he had accused himself.

After what he had told her, however, in spite of an undefinable *something* which still attracted her towards him, she could only regard him with horror.

Her brother was almost her only relation in the world; she loved him devotedly. Now she

learnt, from this soldier's lips, that he, whom she had nursed through the most terrible illness—he—had deliberately tried to kill him. She felt the blow of this intelligence the more keenly at first, since she had made such desperate efforts to save Warren from the jaws of death. After his confession, however, she could not, in the relapse that ensued, leave him in the hands of others,—could not desert him. For the shock that Warren had experienced at again seeing Carston,—his humiliation at the discovery that the man he had regarded as his bitter enemy, the man whose life he had attempted, had been the first to sympathize with him in his trouble, to visit him in his sickness,—the pain and grief he had suffered at the intelligence that this same man was no other than the brother of the woman to whom he owed his life—the bitter agony and shame of his confession to this woman, to whom he was bound by every tie of gratitude, and whom in the first few weeks of his recovery he had learnt to love—to worship—however hopelessly—all these combined were beyond the endurance of his returning strength, and within half an hour of Carston's departure he was raving in delirium.

And sister Nita did not flinch from the calls of duty, but again devoted herself to her patient,

realizing his danger. But she considered, if he should die now—would it matter? What had he confessed himself to be? What loss would he be to the world, or—to her? Why had she previously allowed herself to regard with such extraordinary interest—an interest beyond the ordinary instincts of humanity and sympathy—the continued existence of this man of whose antecedents she knew nothing—who was but a common trooper? Why, as he had passed from the acute danger of his sickness, had she seemed even to discover in him (so she had flattered herself) no ordinary character? She could find no answer to these questions. She only knew that this was a man who had been a would-be murderer of her own brother,—her brother more dear to her than all else on earth!

Such were the thoughts that beat through Nita's brain as she continued to nurse and watch over Warren until through her care he again emerged from the dangers of his relapse. Gradually, however, as the time passed, though she shuddered at the thought of the evil thing he had attempted, and blamed herself for her weakness, her interest in the soldier returned in spite of herself. For weeks the terrible subject was not alluded to between them; but Nita could see that Richard Warren's mind was much

troubled. He hardly ever spoke to her, except about some trivial matter connected with his food or sickness, or to thank her for some little attention ; but would lie watching her, his eyes following her every movement with a dull sort of *beaten* gaze, till sometimes when she caught them fixed upon her she felt as if she could scarcely endure their melancholy. She knew what he was thinking of, and was convinced that he was inwardly suffering keenly ; and she caught herself continually wondering how a man who was so grateful for any kindness, and who seemed naturally so gentle in disposition, could have yielded to so awful a temptation.

Nita herself acted bravely ; for, as the soldier gradually recovered, she never let him see that his confession had affected her in the slightest degree, but simply carried on her duties as if nothing had occurred, with the intention of never again alluding to the matter. It was during these weary days of recovery (for Warren did not make such rapid progress as he had done previous to his relapse), that in addition to the bitter accusations of his conscience, the sick man became tortured by the all-consuming love with which Nita had not unnaturally inspired him. Before Carston's visit he had unfortunately become a victim to this—considering his

position—apparently hopeless passion; a fact which made his contrition at his mad act doubly acute. Now its intensity increased daily, and bitterly he realized that the knowledge of what he had done made it a thousand times more hopeless. How dare he, nothing but a trooper in a cavalry regiment, have any such sentiments at all towards Sister Nita, who in position was as far removed above him as the stars are above the earth? He could not tell, —his love was not of his own creating. But if at first it had pleased him to vainly dream that perhaps by one of the extraordinary turns of fortune which sometimes occur in life, it might at some future time be within his power to tell Sister Nita of his passion, *now* he could not contemplate even such a vague and shadowy possibility. Whereas previously she could at any rate have regarded him as a man—if a private soldier—now she could only look on him, think of him, as a vile, revengeful coward,—a creature tainted with attempted murder. No indeed! his love was utterly hopeless, nor could he expect any consideration—any pity, at Nita's hands. And yet, from the tender way in which she nursed him, watched him, and when necessary spoke to him, it seemed as if she did look upon him with some measure of pity. And then he

thought of Carston. That he would have related to Nita the story of the Court-Martial and the parts they had mutually played in it, Warren did not doubt. He wondered whether Nita had told her brother of *his* awful confession. He did not think it; she was too true and noble-spirited a woman for that. Had she done so he felt that Carston would have used his influence to get sister Nita removed from nursing him, but he still rejoiced in her presence at his bedside. And the views he had entertained of Carston's action and sentiment towards him! As he lay hour after hour in his bed, and considered them, he perceived how miserably foolish and wicked he had been to credit that officer with any malignity, any wish to take an opportunity, as a superior, of crushing an inferior. And if proved wrong with regard to Carston, might he not have been wrong also in his judgment of the conduct of many others of those placed in authority over him? Carston, the man whose 'harshness' he had resented, the man who had crushed him so low, the man who had cared not a jot for him, or what he might suffer, the man whom he had hated, the man whom in a mad moment of revenge he had determined to hurl into eternity—*that* man had been the first to visit him and inquire after him. *That* man had

expressly come to tell him—and he believed his words—how deeply he sympathized with him for the troubles which had come upon him.

As he realized how mistaken he had been, and perceived that Carston had only done his duty—as he realized the consequence of his own folly—as his heart was torn with regret, repentance, and love for Nita—all the old feeling of resentment against his superiors faded away, and he awoke—humiliated indeed—but a new man—a true soldier—in heart and spirit.

He could not endure, however, the thought that he must be an object of loathing to Nita; and as the days passed, without exactly desiring to justify himself, but more with the purpose of seeking her pity and sympathy, he determined to narrate to her the story of his life before he had entered the service, and to show her how his bringing up had tended to encourage the sentiments he had formerly entertained towards those over him; whereby, when he became the victim of bitter disappointment and imaginary injustice, he had finally been led on to commit hastily an act of desperate wickedness.

After much cogitation and many unsuccessful efforts he finally plucked up courage to ask Nita if he might speak to her, and she consented to hear him.

So he told her that his father, by name George Warren, had been a man of good family, the younger son of a country squire in Norfolk, who had been articled as a clerk to a solicitor. A reckless spendthrift, he had married a woman who, though of respectable parentage, was considerably beneath him in point of birth, and he had consequently been disowned by the rest of his family. The old squire swore never to see his son again, and the two elder brothers had followed suit.

Then had ensued the abandonment of his profession by Richard's father and the assumption by him of the *rôle* of a popular agitator; for George Warren was clever and well-educated. By preaching the doctrine of class against class, he well knew that he would hurt the feelings of his family, shock their Conservative opinions, and might perhaps injure their interests. He took up his abode in the town of Lynn, and for many years eked out a precarious existence by imposing upon the ignorance and folly of others, and by inflammatory contributions to the Press. That he had faith, however, in the doctrines he preached was, doubtless, the case; and hence became inbred in his son Richard's mind the tendency to believe that the hand of the rich (or, more correctly, the so-called 'gentry') was

against the poor, and to overlook the fact that but rarely is there any truth in such an axiom.

Meanwhile Richard, the only child, got a tolerably good education, almost free of cost, through the charity of the master of the school which he attended. From the first this man (himself an advanced Radical) had taken a fancy to Richard, finding him ready, intelligent, and smart; and when his father took to drink and evil courses generally, and could not find the money for his schooling, he continued to teach the boy without charge. Richard's home was now anything but happy. His father had gradually given way to intemperance, and as the boy grew older there was nothing but poverty and misery in store for him. To his mother was due most of the light of his life, for though of inferior birth, she was not unmindful of his father's stock, and she strove to bring up her son decently and respectably. She herself was a woman of no mean capability, who put no faith in her husband's opinions.

Her life, however, especially latterly, was a hard one, for with drinking came—in addition to absolute want—ill-treatment. Richard loved his mother, and it was only for her sake that, as he grew older, he remained at home. Through his own energy and perseverance, however, he

obtained employment as a clerk in a local office; an occupation which was not congenial to his tastes, for, though a thinking and even a well-read young fellow, he was more suited to an active outdoor life, and was anxious to go further afield for his experiences of the world.

The few pounds he earned now went chiefly to support his parents; but it was hard for Warren to see this money being wasted on drink, and to come home and find his father helpless from liquor, and his mother weeping, or exhibiting the marks of her husband's violence.

The misery of his home at this time indeed affected Richard Warren very greatly, and after frequently remonstrating, he warned his father that he would not stand a repetition of such scenes. At last he returned one day and found his drunken father in the act of striking his mother. Filled with rage he seized hold of the former (a big, strong man, but Richard was now a powerful, fine young fellow, nineteen years of age), and pinning him against the wall, he threatened to kill him if he ever touched his mother again.

The excitement of this scene caused his mother's death, for weakened by years of sorrow and trial, to Richard's grief, she succumbed a few days later. Unable to endure the thought

of remaining longer near his father, who died penniless a year or two subsequently, young Warren then left the town of Lynn and threw up his clerkship. He went to London in search of employment, and there, like many another young fellow, not knowing to what to turn his hand, but eager to see something of the world, he offered himself for enlistment. So he became Trooper Richard Warren of the —th Dragoon Guards.

Warren next proceeded to tell Sister Nita of his life in the Regiment, and the events which had led to the final climax and collision with her brother. He told her of the generally mistaken views—consequent on his early training—to which he had been a victim, of his nevertheless successful efforts to do his duty and to keep out of trouble, of his promotion to rank of Sergeant, of the tyranny and spite of the Sergeant-Major, of his own rash words, and of the Court-Martial. He told her how the sentence of that Court-Martial had destroyed the hope and ambition of his life, which had been to become Squadron Sergeant-Major, and thereby benefit his fellow-soldiers. He told her how some actual experiences had wrongly led him to consider that injustice and harshness on the part of those in authority was the rule, not

the exception, in the Army; and how he had accordingly rashly jumped to the conclusion that when Carston had pressed the case against him, he had done so without taking his treatment by the Squadron Sergeant-Major sufficiently into consideration, and not so much from a sense of duty, as from anxiety to crush him and to show his power. He told her how, brooding over this supposed ill-treatment, degradation, and disappointment, he had been seized with a longing for revenge, and how when on the field-day a sudden chance seemed to put a means of gratifying that longing in his way, he had felt utterly unable to resist the mad temptation; how—inspired as it were by some fiendish power—he had galloped madly, desperately on, caring nothing for his own safety, but bent merely on Carston's destruction, until, in the moment of the terrible collision, he knew no more. Then he told her how, when he found himself in hospital—before Carston came to see him—when his strength was gradually returning, and he understood what a narrow escape from death he had had—how he had then not thought it possible that Carston could have been equally fortunate, though he dared not ask; how in those days he had been tortured at the thought of that officer's death, and

how he had realized the awful wickedness of which he had been guilty, at the same time that he had been deeply touched by Nita's attention and kindness. He told her how great had been the shock of suddenly seeing Carston alive, how he had been moved by the discovery that his supposed enemy was really a kind friend, and above all, how fearful to him was the knowledge that the man whose life he had attempted was the brother of the woman who had saved his own. What he had endured on that occasion—the shock—the humiliation—the grief—what he was enduring *now*—he said that Nita could never realize.

All this sad history Richard related to Sister Nita. She heard it without speaking, though her sweet and sympathetic face showed her interest by its varying expressions; and as she listened, full of pity for the experiences of this man's life, it seemed as if the weight of horror that had overborne her was lifted from her.

His life had been hard, she thought. It seemed as if everything had gone against him. Was it so wonderful that, when he had suddenly lost—even though by his own folly—that which, after a hard struggle, he had so nearly won, he had fallen a victim to a mistaken conclusion—to a mad and wicked impulse—to an opportunity

of revenge that Fate put suddenly in his way? Yes! Even though he had attempted her brother's life, she could find it in her heart to pity him!

When he had concluded his story Warren lay still a moment, then looking earnestly and frankly at Nita, he said in a low tone,—

"Sister Nita, I have something more to say to you. You have heard my story, I do not tell it as any justification, but I thank God I did not harm your brother, who has been so good to me. I have nothing to urge in my defence. I cannot ask you to *forgive* me, but—do you pity me?"

She bent over him.

"Yes! I pity you from my heart," she answered softly. "I am very sorry for you,—and I forgive you."

As her eyes met his, Richard Warren's heart was filled with a peace it had never known before. For a moment he could not speak. Then he said in trembling tones,—

"You have saved my life, Sister Nita, and now—you have saved my happiness! I don't know how to thank you."

CHAPTER V.

EARLY in the following March, the —th Dragoon Guards, still at Newbridge, were in a state of considerable excitement. They had recently received orders to hold themselves in readiness to proceed to Egypt, and expected to sail in about a week's time. These orders came as somewhat of a surprise, since, though next on 'the roster'[1] for foreign service, they would not in the ordinary course have moved until the following Autumn, when their destination was supposed to be India. Some disturbances among the native population in Egypt, however, which it was feared might—if England did not show her determination to assert her authority—lead to a general uprising, caused the British garrison to be suddenly increased; and hence the decision to despatch the —th Dragoon Guards. Both officers and men—especially the latter—were pleased at the intel-

[1] i.e., on the list kept at the War Office.

ligence. They had got tired of Newbridge and the Curragh—terribly dull stations for the private soldier—and the prospect of a brush with the enemy, or at any rate of a new country and new scenes filled them with pleasurable anticipation. Nor was Warren an exception. He, too, looked forward to seeing Egypt, and was heartily sick of being quartered at Newbridge ; but for one reason he thought of his departure with dread—it would probably mean "farewell" for ever to Sister Nita !

Since our last meeting a great change has come over Richard Warren. After the narration of the story of his life, and Nita's forgiveness—so freely given—his health had rapidly improved, and within a few weeks he was able to take the month's sick furlough which was granted to him. Meanwhile his love had deepened, and he had had a hard struggle to conceal his feelings. He appreciated, however, the wide gulf that separated him and Nita, and how improbable it must be that she could harbour any feelings towards him beyond those of friendly interest and sympathy. He had determined, therefore, to restrain himself and not in any way to put her in an awkward position or to give her pain. Yet, when on leaving the hospital he had nerved himself for the inevitable,

and stammered out a faltering "good-bye," and a few words of renewed gratitude, he had not failed to remark how the colour faded from her cheeks, nor how it seemed as if her eyes could not meet his own.

"I hope you won't forget me quite," she said, and her sweet low tones thrilled him. "I wish you greater happiness and—success—and —I hope we may meet again sometimes." She held out her hand towards him.

For a moment a wild thought, a wild hope, shook him. But he crushed it down, and mastering himself, said quietly, while he took the proffered hand,—

"Forget you! Sister Nita, I can never do that! I owe everything to you—my life—my happiness. I leave this hospital a different man to what I was when I entered it, thanks entirely to you. I hope to prove this to your brother and others when I get back to the Regiment. It is good of you to say you hope we may meet again; but unless I fall ill, there is little chance of that. Forget you!" he repeated. "Indeed, I could never do so! Good-bye!"

Warren had taken Nita's hand, and throughout this speech it lay within his own. She made an ineffectual effort to remove it from his

grasp ; but, although he spoke with admirable restraint, he only gripped it tighter, and she could feel the quivering of his nerves. At his last words—impulsively—forgetful of himself—he raised it to his lips, and kissed it passionately. Their eyes met, and Nita learnt—without a word—that she was the object of this soldier's wild, despairing love, and—agitated, trembling, and ashamed—she fled.

When the orders came for the Regiment to move to Egypt, Trooper Richard Warren recalled this scene, as he had so frequently done in the past few months. What did it mean? Could it mean that Nita cared for him? No! she had done nothing to lead him to such a supposition. He did not—*he*, the former attempter of her brother's life—price himself at so high an estimate. He had merely been a fool! He had disclosed his feelings—his passion—by that kiss on the hand—that wild look ; he had broken his resolution ; he had grieved, he had pained her. But once since that occasion had he seen her, when her brother had driven her over to the Newbridge Barracks. He had gone to the Guard-Room with a message, and while there, they had passed, but had not noticed him. And now he longed—oh! so madly—so hopelessly—to see her once again—once more

to hear her voice before he left for Egypt. A thousand ideas suggested themselves to him. Should he write—ask her to let him come and tell her how he had been getting on since his return to the Regiment,—how much happier he was,—how altered the conditions of soldiering appeared to him—once more express his gratitude for all she had done for him, as he might never get another opportunity. She had said she would like to see him again. Could he not then write and suggest such a visit—naturally—reasonably? Or again, should he attempt *no* concealment—pour out the agonizing passion of his soul—tell her frankly of his love—say that this departure forced the confession from him? But Captain Carston—her brother—had shown him much kindness, had assisted him since he left hospital; would he not—if it came to his knowledge—deem such a letter from a soldier in his own Regiment—a trooper in his squadron—a gross impertinence, an unwarrantable presumption? And would Sister Nita conceal such a letter from her brother? He had done Carston one terrible wrong already, was he to do him another? No! the idea must be abandoned. He was a trooper—Nita, a lady, miles above him in station. Their ways lay widely apart. This love of his was, under the

circumstances, too wild a folly! It had been sent to madden him. It was not of his own seeking. But how he cursed his luck! Then he swore a secret oath, that though he might not approach her, might not be able to speak to her,—he would *see* her again before he left. But how? He could not tell.

. . . . .

Before Warren left the hospital, Carston had been promoted, and—to the satisfaction of the men, for he was a popular officer—had been appointed to Warren's squadron. Neither Carston nor others in the Regiment had any suspicion that the soldier had tried so madly to injure him; for Sister Nita had strictly kept his confidence. The "accident," and the danger through which the trooper had passed—a better acquaintance with him after his visits to hospital—had only served to interest Carston the more in Warren; and since the latter's return to regimental duty he had benefited considerably through his Captain's kindness. For Carston, anxious to soften in some measure the disgrace of his Court-Martial, had obtained for him the appointment of permanent Orderly to the General Officer commanding at the Curragh, a post of considerable trust. Thus—as Warren jokingly said to one of his comrades—

selected for 'the Staff,' he was saved many irksome duties and parades, while the appointment also gave him a certain amount of prominence among the men; since only the smartest soldiers are selected for such posts, which are always objects of envy.

. . . . .

Some four evenings before the date now fixed for the departure of the Regiment, Warren was taking a solitary walk across the Curragh. The General had left the camp that morning for a day or two, and consequently his duties had been soon over, and he had been in barracks all the afternoon. He was full of unrest, for he had not yet accomplished his determination to get one more glimpse of Nita, and he did not know how to bring it about. After the tea-hour, however, he set out from Newbridge barracks with the vague notion of walking to the camp, and past the hospital. Possibly—it was not at all probable—but *possibly* he might see Sister Nita somewhere in the neighbourhood, perhaps on her way to the Sisters' quarters, which were situated just outside the hospital; or he might call in there and visit one of the Orderlies with whom he was acquainted, and so obtain a remote chance of seeing her. Accordingly he set out for the camp. On arriving, however, at the point

where the road enters upon the green expanse of the Curragh, profiting by the lovely fresh evening, he turned to the left and bent his steps across the grass, instead of following the direct route. His time was his own ; he was as likely to see Sister Nita later as earlier ; there was nearly an hour before the sun would set, and he felt that in that fresh air, on those green slopes, alone, unseen, he could find some sort of grim enjoyment in the contemplation of his misplaced affections.

Leaving 'head-quarter block,' (that collection of draughty huts, the temporary occupation of whose comparative 'roominess' is the ambition of many an officer's wife, and the cause of many heart-burnings), on his right, he made his way towards 'Donelly's Hollow,'—so called from its having been in former days the scene of a great prize-fight, in which an individual of the name of Donelly figured, whose prowess is related on a memorial-stone erected on the spot. This historic piece of ground he also left on his right, and then pursued his way in the direction of the flagstaff on the hill behind the rifle 'butts.'

When he had gained the summit, he paused to admire the view and the glories of the red ball of the sun, shortly to sink to rest in a brilliant sea of green which stretched away

as far as the eye could reach, unbroken save by the long ridge on which is situated the camp, itself an interesting and picturesque feature in the landscape. Soon his eyes would, he supposed, look out on different scenes—farewell to such an one as this! He smiled cynically to himself as the thought struck him that when he arrived in Egypt there would be a 'desert' in his heart as well as at his feet.

He walked on over the undulating ground, here pitted with numerous dips and hollows, and bright with clumps of gorse bursting into yellow bloom. It was his intention to stroll as far as the boundary, and then return direct across the rifle ranges to the camp and hospital. He had not for some considerable time met anyone, and he had now reached a somewhat lonely spot far removed from the camp at a distant angle of the Curragh.

As he descended the slope of one of the hollows mentioned, his heart suddenly stood still, then beat rapidly with excitement, for he was under the distinct impression that he had seen in front of him at about fifty yards distance the red cape of one of the nurses of the hospital. Such was the nature of the ground that he could now see the cape no more, but he quickened his footsteps. He had proceeded only a few paces

when there fell upon his ears, first a frightened cry of distress, then a long terrifying scream—"Help!"

He rushed forward. He had not been mistaken. Before he could reach the summit of the opposite slope, the cries were repeated three or four times, then he heard no more.

At last he gained the higher ground, and for a moment was almost transfixed with astonishment and horror at the scene laid bare in the hollow beneath him. For there was Sister Nita lying on the ground, with a hulking Irish ruffian whom Warren had frequently seen haunting the barrack gates kneeling over her, grasping her two hands firmly in his left, while with his right he was in the act of strangling her with a rough handkerchief or scarf which he had twisted round her neck.

Nita was lying helpless and motionless; and Warren, in an agony of terror, lest she was already past assistance, flew on across the twenty yards of space which separated them. The Irishman was kneeling obliquely to the direction in which the soldier was approaching, consequently he was not at first aware of his own danger.

"So ye won't be afther helpin' me, won't ye?" he was saying, "Shure, thin! will it be only for

yeself ye'll kape the money? By the holy mother of God! I'll show ye now whether I'll have it or no—though it's murther it costs me, darlint!"

With these words the ruffian gave a savage twist to the handkerchief, then hearing Warren's hurrying footsteps he turned his head and saw him. Taken completely by surprise, with an oath he sprang to his feet, and would have fled, but Warren was already at his side. With one terrific swinging blow the soldier sent the man sprawling upon the grass, moaning from the agony of a broken jaw; then seeing that, for the time at least, he was *hors de combat*, he threw himself on his knees by Nita's prostrate form.

CHAPTER VI.

NITA, unaware of the approach of her deliverer at the moment when it seemed that the clutch of death was upon her, (the horror of her helplessness, the awful choking sensation in her throat was for ever after a living memory to her), had to her astonishment suddenly felt her hands loosed, and that she could breathe again.

Then came a vision of a figure clothed in a tight, well-fitting, scarlet stable-jacket, and a pair of dark blue overalls, bright with broad yellow stripes, whose face was more than familiar to her, and the assistance of whose strong arm was all that she could most have wished.

She saw the blow dealt to the cowardly blackguard who had attacked her; but, as her deliverer knelt at her side—weakened by the terror of her late experience, overcome by the reaction caused by the knowledge of her unex-

pected rescue and by the recognition of her deliverer's personality,—she fainted.

As Warren leant over her an awful fear overwhelmed him. Was she dead or dying? With feverish haste he tore the handkerchief from round her throat, and in agony he called upon her name.

"Sister Nita! Sister Nita!" he cried. "It's all right now! I'm here! No one shall harm you! It's I,—Warren, whom you nursed in hospital,—whose life you saved. Oh, for God's sake, hear me! For God's sake, hear me!"

He looked round helplessly to see if there was any assistance at hand, but there was no one to be seen save the Irishman still lying on the grass, and moaning in his pain. He unfastened the collar of her cape and dress, and laid bare her throat, the beauty of whose gleaming whiteness was marred by a great blue wheal; and he almost wept at the thought of what she must have suffered, and cursed his luck at not having arrived sooner upon the scene. He strove to collect his thoughts. He remembered—it had only happened a few seconds before—that as he turned to her after successfully attacking the Irishman, her eyes had been open, and apparently fixed on him. Surely, then, this was no more than a swoon! Com-

forted by this reflection, he took her hands, whose wrists also bore the marks of violence, within his own, and chafed them. Then he bent down and leant over her bosom. Thank God! he could hear the irregular fluttering of her heart. Oh! that she were *his*—unhurt—his very own,—he wildly thought, and that only he had the *right* to lean his head for ever upon her breast!

Nita, however, showed no signs of recovery, and he was at a loss how to restore her to her senses. If only he could procure some water it might revive her! But the camp was a long way off; and the nearest cottage, from which indeed Nita, who had gone there on an errand of mercy, was returning when attacked, was nearly five hundred yards distant.

He could not leave her by herself while he sought aid. The ruffian who assaulted her was still there; but even if he could get rid of him, if she were left alone, lying senseless on the Curragh, who could tell what other dangers might befall her?

By this time the Irishman was sitting up, swaying his body backwards and forwards, groaning as he nursed his broken jaw, and glaring vindictively at Warren. At length the latter could stand this no longer, so he left Nita's side, and went to the man.

"Look here!" he said. "If you don't go from here at once, I'll break every bone in your body. I've more than a mind to do so now for daring to attack this lady, but you shall suffer for it. I'm not afraid of losing you! You'll be easily found when we send the constabulary to search for you. Now go!"

The man rose slowly, and, glancing from Warren to Nita with a look of hatred, and still holding his hands to his jaw, went off sullenly in the direction of the road.

Warren, who when he considered the terrible nature of the assault had, at the ruffian's parting look towards his victim, with difficulty kept his hands off him, watched him for a few seconds till he was satisfied that he did not intend returning, then again devoted his attention to Nita.

Still no sign of consciousness! He was at his wits' ends what to do! It was a lovely evening, but the sun was setting, and it would soon be dark. What was to be done? He must carry her to the hospital! It was a long way, but he would do it. But how was he to avoid being seen as he neared the camp? Probably a crowd of soldiers and others would be attracted round them, and though Sister Nita might know nothing of it now, she could not but subsequently dislike the notoriety. Would

she wish the vulgar gaze of the camp to see her borne along in his—a private soldier's—arms? He thought not. Then he recollected the cottage which he could see in the distance. Here was a way out of the difficulty! He would carry her there, and if she did not then recover soon, he could go or send to the camp for assistance.

Rejoiced at his decision, but full of anxiety for Nita, he commenced his task.

With difficulty, but with great tenderness and care, he raised her from the ground.

Now she is in his arms, and he has started on his journey. A moving sight—for all its strangeness—is the soldier and his burden! Her head, which he had freed from her nurse's bonnet, is cradled in his shoulder; the scarlet folds of her cape blend with his scarlet coat, from which her face, deathly pale, but beautiful, gleams forth in brilliant contrast. Her glorious hair, illumined as a halo in the rays of the setting sun, has burst from its simple coils, and one long, heavy tress hangs, as a scarf of gold, almost to his feet.

He looks upon her. He had longed, oh! how he had longed! to see her once again. How strangely had his prayers been answered! How wonderful that he, of all men, should have

been chosen to rescue her! For now he had overcome his early terror, and, though alarmed at her prolonged unconsciousness, he felt that her life was safe. But for this adventure how could he ever have seen her? Now he had not only seen her, but, thank God! had saved her—as she had once saved him! He even rejoiced in her unconsciousness. How otherwise would it have been possible for him to fold her in his arms? Now it seemed to him as if the bridge was crossed. The barriers of life and station were burst—if only for a space. It was fate! As he bears her onward, scarce conscious of her weight, as he gazes on her loveliness, as he clasps her to him, his whole heart pours out to her in the passion of his love. He is filled with ecstasy, with an indescribable sense of possession—now—now she is his—*his alone!*

He bends his head towards her face, tightening his arms around her, and seals his love with passionate kisses on her lips.

And *thus* she wakes . . . and *smiles!*

. . . . .

In the intoxication of his excitement Warren had not observed the signs of Nita's returning consciousness. Indeed, these had been slight; and to her it seemed as if she only awoke to the knowledge that she was safe from some terrible

danger in the arms of the man she loved. More than this did not strike her, and—she smiled! In the midst of his passionate embrace Warren had become suddenly aware that her eyes were open. What had he done? In the flood of his excitement he had taken a mean advantage of her helplessness—had forfeited all claim on her gratitude! He started back, and, still holding her fast, stopped short in his progress. But the grey eyes looked not unkindly on him, the sweet smile that spread over Nita's face reassured him, and so again he bent his head.

Their lips met, and Richard Warren learnt what he had never hitherto dared to hope—to dream, even—that Nita *loved* him.

Nita moved in his arms. He loosed his right hand from beneath her, and placed her on her feet. Then he drew her once more towards him, and strained her to his breast. Her head sank on his shoulder and unchecked sobs broke from her. Thus—forgetful—heedless of all save the unspoken knowledge of each other's love—for a space they stood. . . .

"Good heavens!" cried a voice behind them, in astonishment. "Why, it's . . ." and the speaker stopped short as if unwilling to say who it was; then he added to himself in a much

lower, horrified tone, "With a man of the Regiment, too!"

Warren turned and saw on horseback close behind him Major Lawrence, of his Regiment, (the officer who had been President of his Court-martial), and . . . *Captain Carston!* Nita looking up saw them too, and shrank as she marked the expression on her brother's face. Warren, however, although he appreciated the awkwardness of the situation, did not lose his presence of mind. Fearing that Nita might faint again, he supported her trembling form, but faced round with something of defiance in his attitude.

Meanwhile, Carston had not spoken. He had reined up his horse within a few feet of Warren, and sat gazing, his face set with an indescribable expression of rage, horror, and shame. In his right hand he carried a heavy, thongless hunting-crop. To him the sight meant the sudden and ruthless uprooting of all his faith in Nita's goodness and purity, all belief in her nobleness of character—her utter degradation—in that she, as a lady, was thus found in the embraces of a private soldier. And as for Warren! This, then, was the way that he repaid him for his sympathy—his help! Filled with fury he raised his arm to strike, but his

brother officer, divining his intention, seized his wrist.

"Stay! Carston," he said. "Do not touch the man! Remember you are an officer; though, damme! it's enough to madden a fellow."

"Leave me, Major!" said Carston, in a hollow voice, which sounded to Nita like the death-knell of his brotherly love. "I must settle this matter myself. I don't care *what* happens."

"Nonsense, man, don't be too hasty! You don't know the circumstances yet. They may not be as bad as you imagine."

"They can't well be worse. My God! that you should have seen it too!" He turned again to Warren, whose protecting arm still clasped Nita's trembling form, and whose attitude of quiet defiance—without disrespect—was still the same. "Take your hands off that lady, sir! How dare you touch her? By what right are you here—with her?"

"By no *right*, sir," was the respectful reply, "except that of the protection of a lady in distress."

"Protection! Oh! my God! Who from? When we came up, were you protecting her? Do you wish to protect her from *me?* Is your present attitude protection? Leave her, I say . . ." he again threatened to strike Warren,

but was again thwarted, this time by Sister Nita. She tore herself from Warren's arms and clasped her brother's knee.

"Oh, Frank!" she cried, "don't be too rash, too hard! I have had a terrible adventure. See here!" and regardless of Major Lawrence, she bared her lovely neck. "He—this soldier, Warren, whom you know—saved me from being robbed and murdered. It is true! He came—quite by chance. He knocked the man down who attacked me, and would have killed me, and —I fainted. He carried me—and—I recovered —and—and . . ." She could say no more.

"That is a terrible story, Nita," said Frank, somewhat softened, "but that is not all. What is the explanation . . . of what . . . we saw?"

"The explanation is, sir," it was Warren who spoke, "that for a long time I have tried to crush my feelings towards your sister. She should never have known them! I would never have told her, never have willingly wounded you or her; but, by accident, I helped her in this adventure she speaks of, and I was forced to carry her in my arms. I—I lost my self-control, and—she recovered. It was all my fault. Do not blame her! I am sorry to have so repaid your kindness. I should have known better—but I am only a man—I have worshipped your

sister since she saved my life in hospital. I have not acted dishonourably towards her, and —as there is a God above me! I could not help myself."

"But, Nita," cried Frank, almost beside himself at this declaration, "Nita! what have you to say? What *can* you say?"

"I have this to say, Frank," replied Nita, quietly, though trembling, "I have nothing to be ashamed of—though, perhaps, you may think so. It has all been—it *is* very terrible. But—he saved me, and—I am glad—it has happened —for I—*love* him!"

As she said the last words she turned her head, and caught Warren's eyes fixed upon her.

Then she buried her face in her hands upon her brother's saddle-bow.

CHAPTER VII.

NITA'S confession will doubtless be thought unbecoming, and her love for Warren 'quixotic,' or, at the least, unwise. She, a lady, had forfeited her right to be so called, by declaring that she loved a private soldier! That is the way the world would look at it. That was the way her brother looked at it, feeling accordingly an intensity of shame.

Major Lawrence, however, who unbidden and, indeed, to his own chagrin had had to remain as a spectator, (in consequence of his fears lest Carston's natural anger might result in violence and subsequent trouble), did not so condemn her. He perceived that Nita and Warren were no ordinary individuals. He admired the quiet truthfulness with which the latter had acknowledged how he came to take such apparent liberties—the nobility with which Nita, grasping the trooper's awkward situation, forgot *herself* and declared her love, regardless of conse-

quences; and when he learnt the circumstances of Warren's long sojourn in hospital, he even sympathized with the lovers. That Nita's affection was genuine he was convinced, and as he had himself made a runaway match he was perhaps more competent than others to form an opinion on this strange love affair.

That Warren, though nothing but a trooper, should have fallen in love with Nita he could easily understand—however dreadful this might appear to her brother. What young fellow, indeed, thought Major Lawrence, brought into constant and daily contact with such a charming woman, would not, if his affections were not already otherwise engaged, if he had any appreciation of what was good and sweet and beautiful, become Nita's devoted slave? Because a man is a private soldier, are his thoughts, feelings, and passions necessarily differently constituted to those of persons in a higher station? Major Lawrence shrewdly suspected that if the truth were known, there was more than one trooper in his Regiment, or 'Tommy' in the camp who, at sight of Sister Nita, felt his heart beat quicker. That Nita should love Warren, however, was a different matter, and one that he could not altogether fathom. Here was this girl, beautiful, charming,

talented—who, although a hospital nurse, was known to be wealthy, who could have her choice of suitors—bestowing her affections on a trooper!

Major Lawrence looked at Warren with increased interest as he walked by his side, for they were on their way back to Newbridge together. Carston had returned with Nita to the hospital. No more had been said after Nita's declaration; and her brother, as if stunned, had simply without a word dismounted from his horse and led her away. Major Lawrence had been left looking after them, with Warren standing close to him.

"Are you going back to barracks?" said he at last, breaking an awkward silence.

"Yes, sir," replied Warren.

"Then we'll go together, if you can keep up with my horse."

There was a feeling of wild elation in Warren's heart. Nita loved him! He knew it now! Had she not given him every possible token of her love? Had she not openly declared it? Thank God for all that had passed that day! How wonderful it was! But what would be the upshot of it? What would Carston do? Warren had meant no wrong, no ingratitude, to him—of all people in the world. All such

minor considerations and thoughts, however, now became merged in the one important truth —the knowledge that he—*he* of all men—had won Nita's heart, that she was *his*—his own.

Major Lawrence noted the expression on his face, and, entering into conversation with him, had soon learnt the whole story of his meeting with and rescue of Nita, and something of the soldier's earlier history. He found him quiet, intelligent, and refined in speech, even gentlemanly in manner. It was evident that Warren was outside the ordinary run of soldiers; and as he was a smart fellow, and a handsome one to boot, by the time they had reached the barracks Major Lawrence had become doubtful in his mind whether, in spite of the apparent incongruity of station, Sister Nita had not, after all, shown her sense in bestowing her affections upon him. He could not help feeling a sense of friendliness towards the man, and when they neared their destination he said,—

"Of course, Warren, this matter will be kept private by me. I shall not speak of it except to Captain Carston, but I can't think what he will do. It will be awkward for him and you. I am sure he could not keep you in his squadron, and I don't quite see how you are to remain in the same Regiment. I must see if I

can't help you to get transferred to some other corps."

"Thank you! sir," said Warren. "I am really grieved to have caused Captain Carston this trouble. He has been very kind to me, and I am deeply grateful to him. I would not have willingly distressed him for all the world! I hope you believe me, sir?"

"Yes, I do; but it's very disagreeable for all of you."

"It is indeed, sir. But if it had not been for my chancing to help Sister Nita like that, I might never have seen her again, and she certainly would never have known what I felt. I should have made up my mind to bear it all in silence. What'll happen now, I don't know!"

"Well, we can only hope it will all come right in the end — somehow. Good-night, Warren."

"Good-night, sir. I hope it may come right, as you say."

Major Lawrence watched the soldier take his way to his barrack-room with misgiving. It was an awkward situation, the awkwardest he had known of in all his experience, and the more so because Carston was deeply indebted to Warren for having rescued his sister from

the hands of a murderous ruffian. Well, the Regiment was off to Egypt in a few days! Perhaps that would show a way out of the difficulty? Comforted by this thought, Major Lawrence went to his quarters and was there immediately greeted with the intelligence that the orders for the departure of the Regiment to Egypt had been countermanded at the last moment, and that in all probability they would not now go abroad till October!

"Just like that d——d War Office!" he exclaimed. "At their old games!" Then his mind flew back to Nita and Warren, and he wondered what would be the upshot of it now?

Meanwhile Carston and Nita were on their way to the hospital. She was still weak and agitated, so Carston had to support his sister, but throughout the length of their toilsome trudge they neither of them spoke a word.

Carston's face bore an expression of a terrible and sudden shock; he had only one thought—Nita's, and through her—*his* shame. The woman whom he had set on a pinnacle of all that was noble and pure—his sister—that woman of all others had descended to such depths as to accept the love—the embraces—of a trooper! More, she had herself returned,

had openly declared that she returned—that love! It was too dreadful a thought! He dared not speak to her. Henceforth they could be brother and sister no more!

As for Nita—her heart torn with conflicting emotions, upset by all she had gone through—she hardly knew what was passing. She only knew her brother would not speak to her—would not look at her.

At last they arrived at the hospital.

"Good-night, dear Frank!" she said.

"Good-night!" he answered.

"Aren't you glad," she sobbed, "that I'm—safe—from that awful man who attacked me? Won't you say anything? If—if—*he* had not saved me, I should—perhaps, have been—dead now."

"Better that you had been dead, than have brought this disgrace—this scandal upon yourself—and me." And without another word he mounted his horse and left her.

When she reached her own room, she tried to collect her thoughts, to steady her nerves. She shuddered as she thought of her terrible adventure; then smiled, as she remembered the sense of relief that had come over her when she suddenly discovered Warren by her side as a protector, the ensuing blank, until she awoke

in the soldier's arms. But what had she done? Accepted that soldier's love—given him her own, and thereby lost her brother's! Frank said she had disgraced herself—and him. Was this true? If she had found a man, whom she knew to be worthy of her affection, was it a disgrace to bestow it upon him because he was only a trooper in a cavalry regiment? It might be so—in the eyes of the world. She did not care for the world, but she did for her brother. She knew all Warren's antecedents; knew that he had gentle blood in his veins; knew that his aims, his hopes, his ambitions were—in spite of his previous misguided beliefs, his act of mad passion—lofty and noble; knew that he had intellect, force of character, refinement. She could not help herself, she loved him. He was deserving of her love—she knew it—and thank God! (whether she lost caste or no she was indifferent), she had the power and the means to raise him from the position in which he now was to her own. For the first time in her life she appreciated—for *herself*—the advantages of her wealth.

Now she understood the meaning of that strange inspiration on the day that Warren had been brought to hospital, that desperate determination to save his life. It was the finger of

fate pointing to her destiny! So let it be fulfilled! . . . even at the expense of a brother's love.

. . . . . .

Carston rode slowly back to barracks. His soul torn with a nameless agony. He could not condone or forgive; his brotherly love could find no excuse for Nita's "shamelessness." He could not contemplate calmly Warren's effrontery and ingratitude. And yet the latter had rescued her from robbery—death—from all that was most horrible to contemplate!

But he could see no light, no way out of the difficulty, although ere he arrived at the barracks he had wisely determined to take no immediate action. He went to Major Lawrence's quarters and announced this determination to him; begging him, however, to interview Warren, and to take the necessary steps for the prosecution of the ruffian who had assaulted Nita.

"I can't trust myself to speak to him at present, Major," he said.

"All right, my dear fellow," replied Major Lawrence, "I think you're quite right. I'll see to everything. There's no necessity for the latter part of the story to come out at all. If you take my advice you will let things rest altogether for two or three days, say, till the

police-court business is over, before seeing Warren again or doing anything. No good being in a hurry!"

"Very well, I *will* take your advice. If you will kindly arrange about the evidence, &c. I'll wait till the proceedings at the police-court are over. But isn't it all a terrible business? I don't know what to do."

"Cheer up! Who knows? Perhaps it will all come right. One thing—that chap Warren really behaved very well, and, there's no doubt about it, he saved your sister from being strangled. I think you as well as she owe him gratitude for that."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Carston. But as he went to his own quarters to dress for mess, he thought—was not what he had said to Nita true? Would it not have been better for her to have died than to have brought this disgrace—for he could look on it in no other light—upon herself and him?

And so Carston did not move in the matter, nor did any communication pass between him and Warren or his sister. Things remained *in statu quo* until the morning—some few days later—that the scoundrel, who had with such cowardice attacked Nita, was brought up before the magistrates. He had been speedily

found in the neighbourhood and identified by Warren.

Meanwhile the latter had been in great suspense. He had had no interview with Carston, at which he was much surprised, nor had Major Lawrence in interrogating him made any further allusion to him. He had not heard a word from Nita, nor had he dared to communicate with her. At times a terrible doubt seized him. Was it all a mistake? Had she truly meant that she loved him? Was she playing with him, or had she uttered those words in order to screen herself in her brother's eyes for having given way to a momentary passion, evoked merely through gratitude to her rescuer; and would she now, consequently, quietly throw him over? This was a fantastic and far-fetched suggestion, and he could not believe Nita to be so false, so base. But, come what might, he would again meet her, see her, at the police-court, when something must be decided as to their future mutual course of action.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN, on the morning referred to, Major Lawrence came down to breakfast, he found a considerable pile of letters awaiting him, and among them a long, blue, and somewhat bulky envelope.

This he took up, examined critically, and then put again on one side with an air of annoyance and disgust.

"Another letter from Carpenter and Haughton, my dear," he said, addressing his wife. "Why the dickens they're always sending me their confounded communications just when they are least wanted I can't make out. But I suppose it will keep till after breakfast."

Carpenter and Haughton were Major Lawrence's solicitors, and as their letters chiefly concerned the impoverished condition of a small estate he owned in Wales, and his own pecuniary difficulties, he did not particularly relish hearing from them.

After breakfast, when he and his wife had adjourned to his small study, he looked at his

watch and perceived that he had half an hour to spare before accompanying Carston to the police-court to hear the proceedings, and to give evidence in corroboration of Warren's.

He hesitated as to whether he should read the letter then or again defer that doubtful pleasure, but finally determined to look through it. "There might be something important in it, you know," he said.

He read the letter through once, his face assuming a grieved and distressed expression, which however changed as he arrived near its conclusion. Then he exclaimed:

"Well, I'm very sorry! Poor old John! Poor old fellow!"

"What *do* you mean, Arnold? Has anything happened to 'old John'? I hope not?" asked his wife. "Why don't you tell me what's in the letter? Has he left you anything?"

"That's right, my dear, ask me half a dozen questions at once and expect me to answer them all in one breath! This is a rather surprising letter, and I must read it again before showing it to you. But I may as well tell you that poor old John died three days ago, and has left me his executor, and possibly a legacy."

"Oh! Arnold, you don't say so!" cried his wife, in tones in which satisfaction at the news

of the legacy and sorrow at the death of a friend were curiously intermingled. "I *am* grieved for him, but how much is it, and who has got everything else?"

"I can't tell you anything now, my dear. I've got some other business to attend to. Do keep quiet for a few minutes, there's a good creature, and let me read the letter again while I have time. You women always want to know so much, all in a hurry."

His wife did not reply, knowing that what her husband said he meant; though she privately thought he was treating her rather badly.

Major Lawrence read the letter through again carefully; then, quietly pocketing it, he turned and rang the bell. His wife looked at him in surprise.

"Smithson," he said to the servant who answered the summons, "please go across to B Squadron Barrack-rooms and tell Trooper Warren that I want to see him here. You know the man, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, tell him to come here as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir," and the servant departed.

"You *are* provoking, Arnold! You might as well tell me about the letter now instead of

bothering with a soldier," here chimed in his wife crossly.

"My dear! please have patience! I have to see this man about something, and I can't tell you anything more now." He had just had time to light a cigarette when Warren was announced, looking somewhat nervous, though, as usual, handsome and smart in his tightly fitting stable-jacket.

"Good morning! Warren," said Major Lawrence. "Now, my dear, I am afraid I must ask you to leave us," he continued, to his wife.

"Oh! very well," she answered, tartly, and left the study ruffled at being still left so much in the dark.

"Sit down, Warren," said the Major, kindly. "Before we go to the police-court there are one or two questions I want to ask you, to which I hope you won't object, as their answers may prove useful and serve to—to elucidate matters. But before I begin, I need not of course warn you to be very careful to-day of your behaviour and manner to—to Miss Carston, if you have to address her. I'm sure you would not wish to compromise her in any way, or to make it more awkward than it is already for her brother."

"Of course not, sir!" said Warren warmly,

"I should not dream of presuming, or giving any hint of the position in which we stand to one another, and I shall treat her just as I should any other lady."

"I feel convinced you will."

"But, sir," continued Warren, "after the case is disposed of, it would be most kind of you if you possibly could arrange a private interview for me with Sister Nita, and I am also very anxious to see Captain Carston again privately. I suppose it must end in my having to give up all thoughts of her—for her and her brother's sake," he added brokenly, after a pause.

"Well, let us hope for the best," was Lawrence's answer. "I think I can arrange about the interviews for you, though whether it can be separate and private in both cases I don't know. Perhaps *I* might have also to be present—but we must see about it afterwards. Now for my questions! Do you mind at all speaking to me of your personal—your family—matters? Please understand that I am only asking you these questions because I consider it absolutely necessary to have the information."

"I have nothing to be ashamed of, sir, and I will give you any information I can," was the reply.

"Very good. Your real name then is—

Warren? I mean—you did not enlist under an assumed name?"

"No, sir! My real name is Warren."

"Richard?"

"Yes, sir! Richard."

"Any other Christian name?"

"No, sir!"

"When and where were you born?"

"At Lynn, sir, in Norfolk, on January 15th, 1865."

"And what was your father's name? Is he alive?"

"No, sir, he is dead. His name was George Warren."

"Had you any other relations in Norfolk?"

"Yes, sir; but I never knew them. I had two uncles, and I think one or two cousins; but my father quarrelled with his brothers, and there never was any intercourse between him and them."

"Do you know what were the names of these uncles, and where they lived?"

"I heard my father speak of them as John and Walter, and they lived at Altringham Hall, near the town of East Dereham, in Norfolk." Warren blushed as the testimony to his gentle descent was thus disclosed.

Major Lawrence's manner was curiously

constrained, and there was an odd expression on his face as he rose from his seat and said,—

"Well, thank you! Warren. I am sorry to have asked you these private questions, but in view of all that has happened, I—I think your information important. Now, it is time for us to be off to the police-court. Until we meet there, good-bye!" and, to Warren's astonishment, the Major held out his hand. Warren took it, and they shook hands warmly, and the soldier withdrew, at a loss what to make of this interview, but with his mind chiefly occupied with the thoughts of again seeing Nita.

. . . . . .

The case had been disposed of as far as possible, and the ruffian who had attacked Sister Nita had been remanded for trial at the Assizes. Carston, Major Lawrence, and Sister Nita had been given seats near the magistrates' bench; Warren had taken a more humble place among the common herd. Both he and Nita had given their evidence clearly and straightforwardly; and no one save the few chiefly concerned had a notion of the romantic features of the story.

Warren had noted Sister Nita's pale face, and

thought her looking ill and worried, but never more lovely. Once only their eyes met furtively, unnoticed by others, but the look she had given him then sent the blood in a tumultuous rush to his heart and head. She loved him. The ideas he had entertained that her actions and words might merely have been the result of a passing passion were false, ungenerous! Yes, she loved him, but she was not for him! He had now made up his mind to that. She should not disgrace, tarnish her family name for him! He would tell her—tell her brother so now! For her sake—to atone for the evil he had previously tried to work against Carston—he would get transferred, or leave the Regiment by some means, relinquish all thoughts of her—for ever! This then was the generous determination at which he had arrived when Major Lawrence sent him word to meet him in the magistrates' private room at the back of the Court. There he went, intent upon his purpose.

He found Major Lawrence, Carston, and Sister Nita all assembled. His was a trying entry; but he put on as bold a face as he could, saluted, and stood to attention, looking neither to his right nor to his left.

Major Lawrence motioned him to a seat, and,

having locked the doors of the room to ensure privacy, at once addressed them :

"I have to say," he began nervously, "that in view of the—the—incidents—that occurred the other day, with which we are all acquainted, Trooper Warren applied to me this morning to obtain a private interview for him with you, Miss Carston, and with you, Captain Carston, respectively, the privilege of which perhaps you will give him. Before you consider the advisability of so doing, however, I wish to tell you something which, I am convinced, will astonish you considerably, and may affect you materially. At the very least it must be considered a most remarkable coincidence.

"I have this morning received this letter"—here he drew the letter previously mentioned from his pocket—"and it is to its contents that I refer. I will not, however, read it to you now—it is rather lengthy and full of legal terms—you will be at liberty to peruse it afterwards, but I will tell you what, after a careful study of it, I have discovered—since that discovery bears very considerably on the fortunes of all of us now here assembled. In this letter, then, I am informed that an old and valued friend of mine—a bachelor—passed away a few days back, and that I am left his sole executor.

I am also, as executor, to receive a handsome legacy *on one condition.* That condition is," and here he spoke very slowly and firmly, "that I discover the whereabouts of his nephew, to whom he has left all the remainder of his very extensive and valuable property." Major Lawrence paused for a second and looked up, scanning the countenances of his auditors, which, however, merely exhibited ordinary interest. Then he continued : "The task is not very difficult, and I think I may already count upon the legacy as a certainty, for I may say that without a doubt I have already discovered that nephew. My old bachelor friend's name was John Warren, of Altringham Hall, Norfolk, and his nephew is—there is not a shadow of a doubt—Trooper Richard Warren, of the —th Dragoon Guards!"

There was a dead silence! His audience were thunderstruck! There was no sound except a smothered cry from Nita. Then Major Lawrence advanced to Warren, who at his uncle's name had started violently, but now sat rigidly, staring in front of him, and seized his hand.

"Warren," he said with emotion, "I had the misfortune to be President of your Court-Martial; and, though I regretted so unpleasant a duty, I helped to bestow upon you the sentence

of reduction to the ranks. I now have the *good* fortune to convey to you this intelligence, and to congratulate you on your promotion to another rank—the position of an independent country gentleman."

. . . . . .

It is not necessary to dwell upon the sequel. It will be sufficient to explain that "old John Warren" was the eldest brother of Trooper Richard Warren's father. The second brother had died some years previously and had left one son only, who had been John's heir. Shortly before John's death, however, this young fellow had been unfortunately killed in an accident, and John, anxious to keep the property in the family, had overlooked the folly and unwise marriage of Trooper Warren's father. Knowing that the latter had had a son, whom he believed to be alive, he had, being in failing health, made a hurried will in which he had left everything to Richard if he could be found. He had no opportunity before his own death of prosecuting any further enquiries, but left these to his old friend Major Lawrence. All these facts were set forth in the letter received by the latter from the solicitors; together with the information that some enquiries had already been made, and that it was discovered that the

inheritor had enlisted in a Cavalry Regiment, though which could not be ascertained. Major Lawrence had at once solved the difficulty; and thus by a fortunate train of circumstances was the identity of Trooper Richard Warren immediately established. It only remains to state that Captain Carston was sufficiently worldly to see no *shame* in now accepting Warren as a brother-in-law; the more so, since Nita was by her marriage obliged to abandon her hobby of Hospital Nursing!

And so Trooper Richard Warren and Sister Nita were wed!

THE END.

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